



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

Al Dhafra Camel Festival

In December a small DNHG group visited Al Dhafra Camel festival in the desert of Madinat Zayed, Abu Dhabi. Inspired by the Bedouin culture and heritage, Al Dhafra Camel Festival is an annual festival, held under the patronage

of His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The festival, mostly known for Mazayna, camel beauty competition, rich prizes and camel deals worth millions of dirhams. The story has it that the most expensive deal was made a few years ago, when a winning camel fetched 15 million dirhams – but died the day after the transaction because of ‘evil eye’. Local Bedouins are also resentful that rich Saudis come to buy winning camels which then disappear from the competitive arena – they are probably used for breeding in Saudi. It can well happen that the camel owner will refuse such a deal, despite the multimillion figures.



Photo by Angela Manthorpe

But there is of course much more to the festival than a camel beauty contest. Other competitions taking place at the festival include camel milking, Saluki races, camel races, falcon beauty contest, falcon hunting contest, dates competition, dates packaging competition, sour milk competition, poetry, photography, shella (a capella singing), pure-bred sheep beauty contest, pure-bred Arabian horse race and even a classic cars exhibition. Most importantly, it is a get-together of the Bedouin tribes of the region, a genuine display of their traditions and most of all, hospitality.

Bedouin hospitality is demonstrated by Sheikh Sultan Al Nahyan, whose majlis daily offered lunches and dinners for all visitors, participants and passers-by in his camp and the DNHG group was also invited.

The two-day visit was well spent in getting familiar with traditions, visiting various events, heritage souk, riding camels, drinking camel milk, tasting dates and goat sour milk with spices, excellently guided and assisted throughout the weekend by the organizers, Wisam and Ali. We camped in the desert, engulfed in a thick fog and incurred some additional adventure by getting one of the cars stuck in the sand during our stay. 2017 was the eleventh year of this festival, which is held under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. Bedouin tribes from across the UAE and further afield attend the festival. We met individuals from Saudi, Jordan and Syria

(Continued on page 4)



2018 is the Year of Zayed, in the UAE. We wish our readers, near and far, a Happy New Year!

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Vicky Dobson, Sonja Lavrenčič, Gary Feulner, Binish Roobas, Angela Manthorpe, Rahul Shah, Tamsin Carlisle, Bernard M, and Harry George.

Send your contributions for the next issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 27th January, 2018

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 7th January, 2017

Lecture Title - "Between a Rock and a Hard Place –stories from under the sea."

Biography - Harry George, M Sc. Oceanography

The result of a wrong turn while cycling through Monterrey in California, led Harry to drop his electrodes, say 'thank you and goodbye' to his PhD supervisor and return to the UK to complete a degree in Oceanography at the University of Southampton. UAE resident since 2014, Harry has worked on a range of projects for the energy industry and can be found at 5 Capitals in Dubai, working as a Senior Environmental Consultant.

What is Oceanography I hear you say? The short answer is to plop a Geographer by his ankles into the ocean and tell him to resume his studies where the hard earth is transformed into swathes of sandy beach, mountains which are 20% higher than Everest and weather systems where a single drop of seawater can be over 1000 years old and have the potential to influence the planet on a global scale. The long answer? ... Find out at the January meeting!

Synopsis

Leave your swimming gear behind as we delve into the deep sea for a light introduction to the New Year. This talk will be suitable for all ages telling on a story of discovery and recovery in the North Sea, but with equal application to all corners of our marine world.

Globally the consumption of fossil fuels is rising and marine reserves are being tapped ever deeper. We will explore some of the key environmental problems facing marine ecosystems with regard to fossil fuel extraction and discover that not all hope is lost.

Recycling Field Trip: Contacts Needed

Many members have asked about the possibility of a field trip to a recycling plant, which we have done only once, many years ago. Recent efforts have foundered at the first step—identifying and making contact with an interested recycler. If you have any contacts at a recycling facility, please let our Field Trip Coordinator, Sonja Lavrenčič, know (contact details on page 8). It would be ideal if you would also be prepared to intermedate to discuss timing, numbers and nature of the trip.

IMPORTANT REMINDER!

MEMBERSHIP

DNHG membership was due for annual renewal in September 2017, for membership through to September 2018. Members who have not renewed by 15th January 2018 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 7th January 2018.

Membershp is still a bargain at only 50dhs for individuals and 100dhs for families. See back page for bank details (if renewing by this method).

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

Geology - Gary Feulner res: 306 5570

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 4572167 mobile: 050 455 8498
email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology - MaryAnne Pardoe
mobile: 050 724 2984 email: maryannepardoe@yahoo.co.uk

Mammals - Lynsey Gedman mobile: 050 576 0383 email: lynseygedman@hotmail.com

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

From the Editor:

Camping weather has arrived in the UAE and DNHG arranged two camping trips this month (cover story and 'Spotlight' page (3).

New visa arrangements are available online, for visitors driving to Oman. Read about this on page 5

January sees the start of Paper Nautilus season. These are quite beautiful but very fragile. Read about some finds on page 4.

In order to avail more trips, the committee need 'more hands on deck' (see pages 2 and 5).

Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

DNHG December desert picnic and camp, Umm al Quwain, by Tamsin Carlisle



DNHG Trip to Al Dhafra Camel Festival, by Angela Manthorpe

Camel milking—one of the highlights of our visit to the festival was the camel milking competition, which according to the programme, was due to start at 6am on Saturday! Delayed by thick fog our group didn't arrive until after 10, but the activities were in full swing when we got there. Here are a few photos to show the process of what is involved in camel milking:



1 In a large enclosure behind the milking pens we found the eager contestants jostling for position. In order to accumulate the maximum amount of milk, the calves aren't allowed to feed - apparently for around 12 hours. They are kept in a small pen, where they cluster around the fence, wailing and crying; the mothers lean over from the other side, presumably providing reassurance.



2 Camel milking competition—When it's time for the different teams to milk their camels, the minders rush in to the enclosure to extract the calf, the mother, and to lead (or wrestle) the two to the milking pens. Chaos ensues as the desperately hungry calf makes a dash for the udder.



3 The milking process is labour intensive. The hind legs of the female are held firmly. The critical milk bowl is well supported and the milking, which looked like hard work, needed a rota of 2 to 3. The calf is tied to the side railing out of the way.



4 Once all the milk has been collected, it's taken to be weighed. The milk is transferred to a standard container on the

scales and the weight is duly noted in the judge's notebook. The milk is then transferred to bowls and buckets, everything is given a quick wash and...if you brought your own bottle...you can sample the produce on site.



5 What about the hungry youngsters? Well after weighing, some of the milk is brought back to the calf, which dives in, gobbles up the contents and emerges contented, with a snout covered in milky froth.

Field Trips

on our visit.

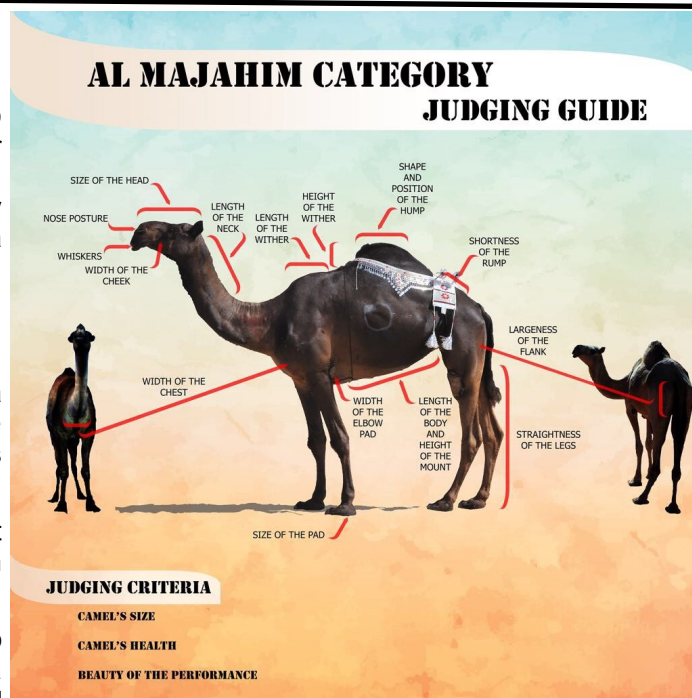
The festival also provides opportunities for tribes and individuals to meet at the various majlis tents, and also provides opportunities for trade and commerce. Much of this takes place along 'Millions Street', where tents, furniture, camping equipment, fruit, clothing and many other items can be purchased from temporary stores. There is also a heritage souk where traditional crafts and local traditions are promoted.

Here follows an outline of the various competitions within the festival:

Dates Competition—for each type of date, farmers submitted a basket of dates. Each individual date would be weighed and the winner would be the basket with the least variation in weight across the dates.

Sour milk competition—souring milk was a means of making milk last longer for the Bedouin. We tasted milk to which ajwain had been added.

Camel beauty contest (Mazayna) - this is one of the highlights of the festival. Judging for the camel beauty contest takes place over a number of days. There are two principal categories—the pure-bred Al Asayel camels (light brown) and the Al Majahim camels (dark brown/black). Farmers enter groups of 50 camels and the winner is the one whose camels get the highest average score. Judging takes place based on various physical criteria (see diagram) as well as non-physical criteria such as health and obedience. It is traditional to anoint winning camels with saffron-infused water. Prize-winning camels are extremely valuable and can be worth in excess of AED10mn. On our visit we were told that a group of camels had been withdrawn from competition at the last minute as they had been sold to a Saudi buyer. Bernard M. also noted the two breeds of camel and observed that the Majahim camels were particularly mesmerizing, with their dark shades, huge size and silky colour. *"They seemed to dominate the show,"* he said, adding that many things are considered in the contest, including the size of its eyes and how long the lashes are, roundness, height and where the hump sits, how low the nose droops, whether the ears stand back and whether the lips cover the animals' teeth, amongst other measured criteria.



Camel milking—over the course of a number of days, the weight of milk produced by competing camels would be measured. The winner would be the camel producing the highest volume of milk over the period. We observed that calves would initially be allowed to suckle the camel, for milk let-down presumably, before being removed, after which time the farmers would start the milking. Sizeable buckets would be filled with the warm frothy milk and then weighed. During the milking process the calf would be kept close to the mother. The farmers would also stroke the camel in order to put her at ease and ideally improve milk output. After the milk was weighed the calf would be allowed to drink the milk, although strict protocols to avoid cross-contamination were not observed. The sound of the milking event left an impression on Harry George, after passing through a sign that said 'The Million Street', apparently named for the value of camels passing on their way to the competition *"We arrived to a cacophony of grunting camels and excited crowds and found ourselves witnessing what initially can only be described as organized chaos but after some time the ritual became apparent, he stated"* Harry also thought that, with a brand new car going to the winner, he wondered what they'd make of his prize-winning marrow!

(See also page 3, photo article by Angela Manthorpe for more on this event).

Heritage Centre—on our visit here we saw Emirati women preparing traditional sweetmeats, met a falcon trainer, saw exhibits of traditional fishing nets and lobster cages, met members of the UAE security forces, learnt about the Abu Dhabi nuclear plant, which is due to commence operations towards the end of 2018, and also saw how old tyres are being converted into colourful landscaping materials for homes and parks. The heritage centre also houses the pavilion which hosts the various prize-giving ceremonies.

The weekend ended with participating in a raucously cheering camel procession, accompanied by cars tooting their horns, all the way to Sheikh Nahyan's camp for the winning celebrations.

Article by Rahul Shah and Sonja Lavrenčič, with contributions by Harry George and Bernard M. Photos by Sonja Lavrenčič (cover photo by Angela Manthorpe)

Field Clips



Beach Finds

The argonauts (genus *Argonauta*) are a group of pelagic octopuses.

Commonly known as the “Paper Nautilus” the exquisite egg casing that the females secrete, are a shell collector’s treasure.

Found in the Arabian Gulf during Paper Nautilus season, January-March, the empty shell cases wash up on the beaches.

There are two species that can be found in the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, *Argonauta hians*, pictured here and *Argonauta argo*, which I have never found, despite much winter beach walking.

Contribution by Vicky Dobson



Creature Feature

On a fishing trip last week, just off Fujairah, my husband mentioned that he’d seen an Ocean Sunfish *Mola mola*, basking near the surface. It was black he said, with an 18” dorsal fin above the surface of the water. As the boat approached for a better view, the fish dived beneath the surface. No photograph then, but curiosity got the better of me, so I searched online for more information on this unusual fish.



Photo Credit: Seraph Production—Sunfish in Musandam, Oman

National Geographic states that sunfish can grow as big as a pickup truck and can carry up to 40 kinds of parasites. Learn more about how the sunfish goes about getting these parasites ‘tended to’ and why they visit the surface of the ocean, by watching this [National Geographic video](#).

They have been spotted before in Omani and UAE waters, but it appears that sightings are quite rare. In 2010, an Emirati fisherman in Ras al Khaimah, caught one in his nets. Read the report [here](#).

Perhaps some of our readers have seen an unusual creature. Send a photo and a short description of it and how you found it, to gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Contribution by Margaret Swan



White Heron at sunset—taken by an enormous traditional wooden dhow being constructed at Jadhafs, Dubai (M. Swan)

Announcements

Oman Visit Visas Online

When driving to Oman, a much faster way than applying for a visa at the border is, applying online. There may be some hiccups, as not all officers are properly briefed.

Visitor Visas are available online at:

<https://evisa.rop.gov.om/home>

The visa for GCC residents is coded 29A (GCC Resident visa—unsponsored), costs 5 OMR and is valid for a 28 day stay in Oman. The visa is valid for 3 months.

To apply for the visit visa you will need:

- Scanned copy of passport (with at least 6 months validity)
- Scanned copy of your residence visa (with at least 3 month validity)
- Photo
- Scanned copy of your Emirates ID
- Credit card for payment

Many expatriates believe that they need to pay the 20 OMR for the tourist visa. However this only applies for professions that are NOT on the list of professions

published on the site. The list covers most of the professions and it is published on [ROP's website](#), as well as helpful information in articles online.

Applying online is quicker than waiting in the weekend border queue—I received mine 2 hours after form submission.

Contribution by Sonja Lavrenčič



Layers forming the Musandam, Oman



Photo taken by Binish Roobas

Members' Night Speakers

Traditionally, the December meeting is when three DNHG members give presentations to the group. The photograph below shows the three members receiving thanks from DNHG Chairman, Gary Feulner (far right). The presentors (left to right) were:

- 1) Anelisa Lambert, who gave a talk on "Saruq al-Hadid—a Journey into the UAE's past."
- 2) Graham Murray, who talked on "Sulphur. a Volcano and the UAE."
- 3) Tamsin Carlisle, with an informative talk on "Learning the avian Fauna of the UAE: land of birds from three continents."

We reluctantly say goodbye to Tamsin Carlisle, as she leaves the UAE.

As Bird Recorder, Tamsin has freely shared her outstanding photographs with members.

Tamsin has demonstrated great patience when photographing natural subjects, rewarding all of us with her detailed shots, especially of birds and insects, which have been recorded for all to enjoy.

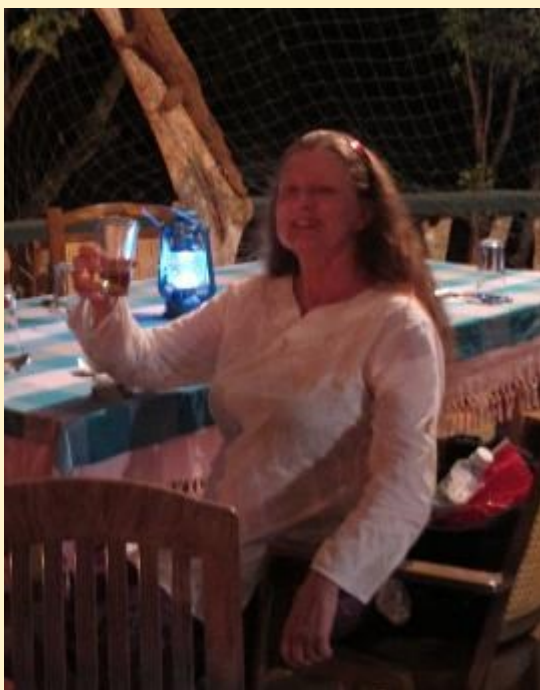
A great contributor to the Spotlight page, we will miss her local contributions, and wish her well for the future.

Announcements

Good Bye, Tamsin

DNHG Bird Recorder Tamsin Carlisle will be leaving us at the end of 2017. Tamsin found the DNHG early in her Dubai career and has been a stalwart at lectures and field trips. She quickly established a reputation as one of our most indefatigable observers and photographers, and we will miss her regular contributions to *Gazelle*. Her UAE legacy will remain in the form of her many online photos at

<https://tinlight.smugmug.com/NaturalHistory/Arabia> and <https://tinlight.smugmug.com/NaturalHistory>.



After Christmas in England, Tamsin will be returning to her home in the south of Turkey – close enough that we expect to see her again from time to time.

Photo: Tamsin on a DNHG trip to Sri Lanka

Contribution by Gary Feulner

Help Wanted: Membership Secretary and Membership Assistant

After many many years, Anindita Radhakrishna is stepping down as Membership Secretary to attend to increasing business and business travel obligations. The Membership Assistant position has been vacant for some time. We need volunteers for both. These positions are ideally suited to meet members and put names to faces.

Responsibilities include taking memberships and renewals at meetings, short-term custody of cash receipts, entering member information into an Excel database, conveying updated information in our e-mail circulation list, sending or assisting with circulars to members, and pruning the database annually. These duties are not burdensome, but records do need to be kept current. Candidates should ideally attend monthly lectures on a regular basis and be prepared to attend monthly or bi-monthly meetings of the DNHG Committee (usually held on the Tuesday night following the monthly lecture).

We need your help. Many hands make light work! Interested members should contact Chairman Gary Feulner, Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers, or Membership Secretary Anin Radhakrishna (*see page 8 for contact details*).

Help Wanted: Additional Field Trip Coordinator

The DNHG's field trip program doesn't just happen. Ideas are planted, dates are suggested, a balance of field trip options is sought. Sometimes experienced field trip leaders need to be encouraged, and new field trip leaders need to be assisted and re-assured. All these are the job of our Field Trip Coordinators. Sonja Lavrenčič, has been ably performing a function that in the past has occupied as many as three people (and she has been leading trips herself), but everybody has their limits.

We need additional people willing to help make trips happen (including new trip ideas). This is another way to become more involved and to ensure that we organize trips that you want (and that you get to go on them).

Members interested in volunteering should contact Chairman Gary Feulner, Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers or Field Trip Coordinator Sonja Lavrenčič. See page 8 for contact details.

Memories of field trips past are shown below:

Coastal Lagoon, Rafa'a



Wadi Qahfi



Wadi Daynah



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- January 7: Harry George - "Between a Rock and a Hard Place—stories from under the sea."
February 4: Ajmal Hasan, Education Manager, Mleiha, under the Sharjah Investment & Development Authority, Shurooq. Photographer, Naturalist and Wildlife Enthusiast

*Field trips will be
circulated to members via
e-mail*

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- January 12: "Turf & Surf" - East Coast Plantations and Beachcombing
January 20: Beach walk and observational sketching (suitable for children and adults —parents to accompany their children)
January 20: Dubai Canal

DNHG COMMITTEE 2017

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

| | Name | telephone | email |
|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Chairman | Gary Feulner | 04 3065570 | grfeulner@gmail.com |
| Vice Chairman | Valerie Chalmers | 050 455 8498 | valeriechalmers@gmail.com |
| Treasurer | Rakesh Rungta | 050 774 4273 | rakeshrungta10@gmail.com |
| Membership Secretary | Anindita Radhakrishna | 050 656 9165 | anin@emirates.net.ae |
| Speaker Co-ordinator | Michelle Sinclair | 050 458 6079 | sinclairm2004@yahoo.com |
| Fieldtrip Co-ordinator | Sonja Lavrenčič | 050 256 1496 | lavson@gmail.com |
| Member-at-Large | Pradeep Radhakrishna | 050 450 8496 | wgarnet@eim.ae |
| Newsletter Editor | Margaret Swan | 050 7984108 | gazelleeditor@gmail.com |
| Librarian/Book Sales | Angela Manthorpe | 056 6441054 | manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk |
| Postmaster | Sandi Ellis | 050 644 2682 | sandiellis@gmail.com |
| Chief Engineer | Binish Roobas | 050 243 8737 | johanruphus@hotmail.com |
| Website Co-ordinator | Sandhya Prakash | 050 551 2481 | sandy_pi@yahoo.com |
| Greeter at meetings | Helga Meyer | 055 821 7266 | willyroaming@gmail.com |

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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?

Send your contributions to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2017 to September 2018. 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.