



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Angela Manthorpe, Gosia van Unen, Carin Leijonberg, Helga Meyer, Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas.

Send your contributions for the next issue to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

By 26th May, 2018



Last weekend three European nightjars (see above) were rescued after colliding with windows/buildings.

European nightjars (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) are nocturnal and are presently migrating north to reach their breeding grounds.

Further information regarding these birds can be found in the [November Gazelle \(page 6\)](#).

Contact Panos Azmanis if you spot any—contact details on page 2.



Jebel Jais

Jebel Jais “The HARD Way!”

On the 9th March, a small group of 8 met at the parking lot near the dam of Wadi Ghalilah in Ras Al Khaimah. At 8 a.m. the group, led by Angela Manthorpe, set off on the very strenuous hike up towards Jebel Jais, which is the highest point of the UAE at 1,934 m above sea level. Although we were not heading all the way up to the highest point, we made sure to be well equipped with water, carrying at least 4 litres each. The sign posted hiking trail started at the parking lot. The trail has recently been renovated with some improved man-made steps, railings at some steep parts and several resting areas with benches made of stones with magnificent views of the mountains, wadis and the Arabian Gulf.

The trail was easy to follow in the first part. The ascent was quite steep but after 5 km we came up to a plateau, where we passed a deserted village. The people who have lived here and cultivated the land must have been very fit to carry all the produce down the quite steep trail to the wadi. Historically, the prices of the crops were high, making it worth the effort to cultivate such a remote place as Jebel Jais. Ras al Khaimah is the most productive region in the UAE when it comes to farming, receiving underground water supplies from the mountains and enjoys the most plentiful rainfall. We continued our hike, up to the next plateau. Along the trail we could see some plants and fig trees. After a while, the trail was not as

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 6 May, 2018

Lecture Title - "The coral masonry of Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al-Khaimah"

Speakers—Dr John Burt and Noura Al Mansouri

Biography - Dr Burt is an Associate Professor of Biology and head of the Marine Biology Laboratory at NYU Abu Dhabi. Dr Burt studies coral reefs across the region and has published over 60 scholarly articles and book chapters on the unique ecology of



Mosque at Jazirat Al Hamra

regional coral reefs and their associated fauna over the past decade. He was the recipient of the 2017 Sheikh Mubarak Bin Mohammed Prize for Natural History of the United Arab Emirates.

Noura Al Mansouri is a Research Assistant in the NYUAD Marine Biology Laboratory and an active diver who is studying coral reef and seagrass ecology in the UAE. She is an author of an upcoming book chapter reviewing the marine ecology of the Arabian Gulf.

From the Editor:

Close-ups of insects and creatures found on the shoreline in the 'Surf and Turf' feature in the article on page 3, whilst on page 4, creatures are observed in a falaj environment.

On page 6 read a report on the colourful observations under the Red Sea.

An explanation of the life cycle of the Blue Pansy butterfly can be found on page 7.

It was a strenuous climb up Jebel Jais (cover article) and it's not for everyone but, a sturdy few tackled the route.

Thanks to those that have submitted contributions from the field trip to Eritrea. These will be collated and published in next month's issue.

Enjoy your read!



The eye-catching Museum of the Future is taking shape on Sheikh Zayed Road (above).

The museum will look like the one in the picture below, when completed.



Books for Sale

DNHG have a selection of natural history reference books on display in the lecture room.

These are for sale before and after the lecture.

Most of these books are not available in bookshops and are written by experts in their respective fields of study.

DNHG Recorders

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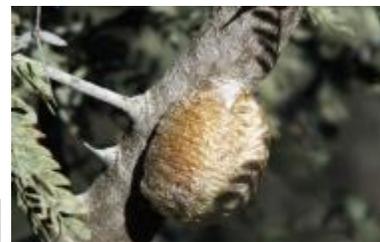
**Mammals - new recorder
needed!**

Spotlight!

DNHG Surf and Turf field trip, by Angela Manthorpe



The shoreline



Mantis egg case



Cicada from above (above)
and from the side (below)



Nassa situla



Chiton

Surf and Turf—East Coast Plantations

This trip, held in Fujairah in February, was a double act with Gary Feulner leading the Turf section and Harry George adding his expertise on Surf (the shoreline). To broadcast his plan, Gary resorted to a mini megaphone and, suitably instructed, the group started with an exploration of an abandoned field with several neem trees (*Azadirachta indica*) and a noisy pair of rose-ringed parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) screeching from a dead palm top. The plantations here vary between actively managed and neglected, and as we picked our way through overgrown lanes we encountered the climbing vine (*Coculus pendulus*) and a large fig tree. A water tank was a draw for several dragonfly species including a female Violet dropwing (*Trithemis annulata*); numerous butterflies were active, including a plain tiger and a male small cupid (*Chilades parrhasius*) – one of the 'little blues'. Studying the trees around an abandoned cemetery, we found firstly, the egg case of a praying mantis and secondly, the discarded exoskeleton of a cicada. We continued our perambulations as the call to prayer rang out and ended in a fenced area with sheep, a cow and some noisy cockerels.

By the time we emerged from the undergrowth the tide had gone out, revealing an extensive rocky shoreline and we all stopped for lunch. Our afternoon session was an exploration of the rock pools in this intertidal zone, which were bristling with brittle stars and short-spined sea urchins. The group headed to a promontory that enabled us to keep our feet dry whilst observing the marine life closely, such as the gastropods nerites and *Nassa situla*. Hidden in crevices were a small number of chitons - these marine molluscs are easily recognisable by their 8 overlapping calcareous plates surrounded by a girdle that resembles shark skin; a large foot enables them to clamp on tightly, withstanding the wave action, as they scrape algae off the rocks with a rasping tongue.

As the water retreated further we found some of the most interesting life hiding underneath the rocks. These hardy communities must sit out the extremes of temperature until the tide returns, so we were careful to place the rocks back just as we found them. One of the most interesting finds was a mantis shrimp. Many won't be familiar with those so tune in next month for a short article.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe (identification by Binish Roobas)

Small cupid (*Chilades parrhasius*) - Male



Violet dropwing *Trithemis annulata* (Female)

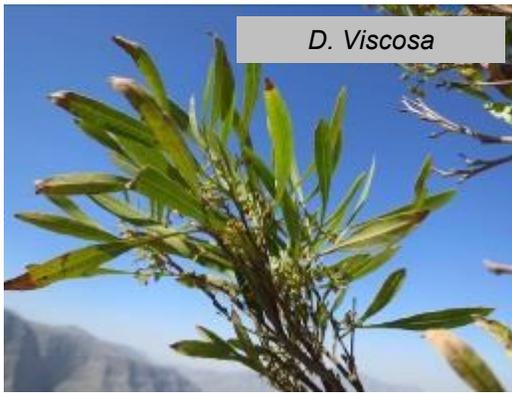
Field Trips

(Continued from page 1)

clear, but we followed the telegraph poles and water pipes and the less frequent hiking signs. The elevation increased and at the steepest part the trail is equipped with hand rails. The ground is covered with loose blocks of stones and at some places there are man-made steps. We were observed by some curious goats. On the last plateau, not far from our goal, there is another small village. It seemed to be inhabited and under repair. From there we could see the UAE flag near our goal. We had our lunch at a nice picnic area at 1,650 m elevation. From there we had a majestic view over the mountains, the sea and the world's longest zip line, 2.6 km, which opened recently. Goats kept us company and eagerly shared our lunches.



Schweinfurthia papilionacea flower



D. Viscosa

We enjoyed our lunch, thinking now it is only descending left with much lighter backpacks. Descending was easier but we had to be careful with the loose rocks. We arrived back at the parking lot at 4pm. The length of the hike was 8 km and according to Garmin, the elevation gain was 1,467 m.



Schweinfurthia papilionacea bush



Toiling uphill

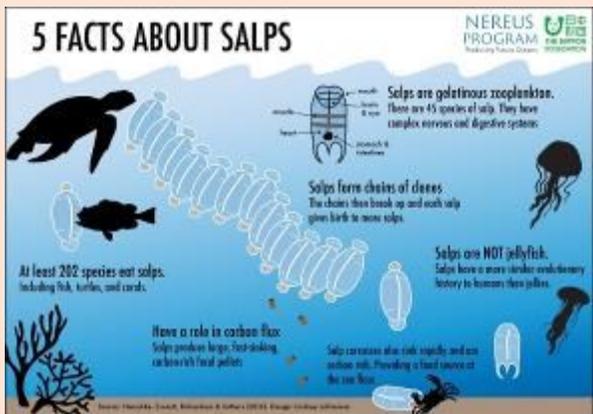
Contribution by Carin Leijonberg

Angela Manthorpe adds:

In the lower part of the trail we were treated to numerous bushy plants – *Schweinfurthia papilionacea* – in flower. At the highest village I took another look at the trees on the hillside and these aren't olive trees as suggested in my article in Gazelle March 2017, but *Dodonaea viscosa*, which is locally common at elevations over 1,000m. It's also a wadi bank plant at lower elevations and as it isn't browsed by goats or camels it can be particularly abundant.

Salp Sighting

Earlier this month, whilst strolling along the shoreline, Helga Meyer found what appeared to be a sac, with a living creature inside.



After taking a photo and some footage, Helga returned it to the sea.

Angela Manthorpe was consulted, who said that it looked like a salp, which is a pelagic tunicate and they are often washed up around this time of year.

Angela also sent an informative graphic which explains five facts about salps.

Field Trips

Shis falaj – a gecko goes for a swim!



Jayakar's Oman lizard (*Omanosaura jayakari*)



Rock semaphore Gecko (*Pristurus rupestris*)

During Ulrike Andorff's second East coast culture and heritage trip we visited the village of Shis and I took time to explore the falaj which hugs the wall several metres above the wadi below.

Approaching from the side of the old village a Jayakar's Oman lizard



Exoskeleton of a dragonfly nymph



Common freshwater snail (*Melanoides tuberculata*)

(*Omanosaura jayakari*) scuttled off along the falaj ahead of me. The water was moving quickly but in amongst the algae were several well-developed tadpoles, the common freshwater snail (*Melanoides tuberculata*) and numerous garra fish (*Garra barreimiae*). While browsing, a strange looking "underwater spider" with prominent dots caught my eye and it was only when I fished this out that I realised I had a scorpion in hand and those dots are on the underside of the abdomen – see exhibit A (top right) if you've never looked at a scorpion's underbelly. Continuing along I found 2 beetles involved in a stand off and I'd just photographed those when to my delight, a rock semaphore gecko (*Pristurus rupestris*) came floating by on the water. It was moving quickly and every now and again it would try to make it to the side of the falaj with some vigorous sideways movements – at one point it managed to

Exhibit A—Yellow scorpion (inset—scorpion in the water)



Beetle 1



Beetle 2



jump to the vertical face but fell back immediately. Looking at the photos I can see a crest on the tail which shows that this was a male. I fished him out but perhaps it was fun on the water because almost immediately he dropped over the edge for another ride (maybe I'd interrupted his high speed commute). After the second rescue I found myself crouching next to the discarded exoskeleton of a dragonfly nymph, which was stuck to the falaj wall.

With all this excitement I completely missed the 7 cars in my convoy exiting the wadi not more than a few metres away which demonstrates I think how engrossing the natural world can be.

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe

Field Clips

Long live the Red Sea!

On a recent trip to Saudi Arabia I was diving in a familiar site in Obhur, north of Jeddah. I was curious to see the condition of the reef and the fish population as I used to visit this particular site at regular intervals over many years. My last trip, however, was 3 years ago. Weather conditions were not ideal with strong wind, dust storm and finally rain. As a result, visibility was reduced to 15-20m, which is considered poor for the Red Sea and there were more than usual brown algae floating in tangled tresses on the surface. Normally the Red Sea is famous for its exceptional water clarity, a result of low rainfall and lack of river discharge. However, even in those adverse conditions you could see a lot and, despite the proximity of the city, there was no visible damage of the coral or diminished reef fish populations.

Most reef species occupy a specific territory within the reef where they live, forage and shelter. This is also where the juveniles, sometimes looking entirely different than the adult species, hide between the coral branches or in caves and crevasses of a reef wall. There were many species of grazers such as wrasses and parrot fish, tiny *Anthias*, triggerfish (Picasso) as well as common triggerfish juveniles (sleeping head-first inside the crevasses of the reef with their tails sticking out). There were puffer fish, boxfish, schools of



Inverted sea anemone and clown fish



Cornetfish, *Fistularia* above soft coral



Scorpion fish

fusiliers, unicorn fish patrolling the outskirts of the reef as well as larger jacks. There were also a few common lion fish hiding under overhangs and a scorpion fish. I was lucky to encounter a green turtle moving unhurriedly from one patch of weed (green algae) to another.

The coral on this reef section was vibrant, abundant and intact. Red Sea corals developed high tolerance to the extreme temperatures, salinity and occasional turbidity (caused by seasonal dust storms) and there are about 300 hard coral species recorded, many of them endemic to the region. Just like the flora and fauna of the desert they are tougher



Giant clam *Tridacna gigas*

than their counterparts in more moderate climates. Interestingly, prolific life that we see in the Red Sea today has only developed in the past 7000 years, evolving at the end of the last Ice Age after a period of stabilized temperature and salinity. Typical and dominant coral varieties include highly branched species of *Acropora* such as table coral, elkhorn coral, and staghorn coral. and *Porites* like hump coral or finger coral. There are also large variety of sponges *Porifera*, *Crinidaria* (stingers) with the sea anemones, black corals, sea whips, Gorgonian sea fans and fire corals, *Actinodiscidae* with many species of *Coralimorph*, Stony corals like secret, sinuous or terrace coral. There are *Bivalves* represented by Large giant clam and Fluted giant clam among others.



A healthy coral community

The Red Sea remains my favorite coral territory. Hopefully increasing domestic tourism, which Saudi Arabia begins to develop will not lead to its demise.

Note: Best places to dive in KSA are Farasan Islands (off the coast of Jizan), Farasan Banks (near Al Leith), Yanbu (north of Jeddah).

Contribution by Gosia van Unen



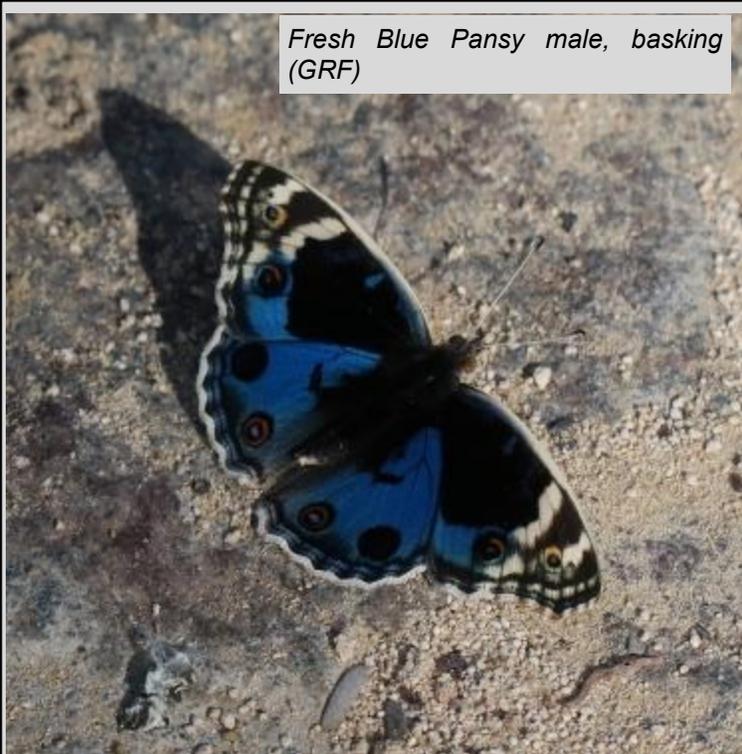
Foraging Green turtle



Typical coral head

Field Clips

Fresh Blue Pansy male, basking (GRF)



Pansy on Petunias

For the most part, the many exotic plant species used in the UAE for public and private landscaping do not find favor with local butterflies, either as sources of nectar or as food plants (host plants) for their caterpillars (larvae). For example, the ubiquitous bougainvillea and marigolds do not seem to be visited by any UAE butterflies. There are exceptions, of course. The multicolored flowers of lantana are visited for nectar by a number of local butterfly species. But until recently, no exotic ornamental plant species were known to be used as larval food plants by native UAE butterflies.

So it was with surprise that, shortly before the year-end holidays, Binish Roobas noticed what seemed to be a mature caterpillar of the Blue Pansy butterfly *Junonia orithya* among the abundant patches of ornamental petunias (*Petunia x hybrida*) at Dubai's Mushrif Park. The Blue Pansy is a common butterfly in the Hajar Mountains but is much less common along the Arabian Gulf coast. Its global range extends from sub-Saharan Africa across southern Arabia to tropical Asia.

The Blue Pansy is known to use a broader spectrum of larval host plants than many butterfly species. Across its range, larvae have been recorded on plant species in a multitude of families, including Acanthaceae (Acanthus), Annonaceae (Custard Apple), Convulvulaceae (Morning Glory), Lamiaceae (Mint), Plantaginaceae (Ground Plantain), Scrophulariaceae (Figwort), Verbenaceae (Verbena) and Violaceae (Violet).

In the UAE the Blue Pansy uses at least half a dozen species from those families as larval host plants in natural and plantation environments. Petunias, however, have their origin in South America and their family, Solanaceae (nightshade, tobacco, tomatoes and potatoes), is a very unusual choice for Old World butterflies generally and has not previously been recorded for the Blue Pansy.

To confirm his identification, Binish collected the caterpillar

and a cutting of petunia stems and leaves, which he refreshed after two days. On its fifth night at home, the spiky black caterpillar disappeared from its potted plant on a table. Binish found it only the next morning, low on the window of sliding glass doors opening onto the balcony. The caterpillar had made a journey of at least two meters distance, traversing unfamiliar table legs, carpet, and door tracks, dodging magazines and cardboard boxes, before at last fastening its hind end to the glass by a silken pad.

It hung on the window for another day before beginning to reveal its chrysalis – a thin, chitin-like envelope within which it would pupate and metamorphose into an adult butterfly. The chrysalis is secreted under the skin of the larva, which is sloughed off, front to back.

Eleven days later, in late morning on the Friday before the new year, Gary Feulner found the butterfly fully emerged and perched motionless on the window beside the open chrysalis. Acting immediately, before it was ready to fly, he transferred the butterfly to a mesh container to prevent it getting loose in the apartment. (Naturally, the phone rang during this operation.) By about 1pm the butterfly began to flex its wings and the color pattern on the upperside revealed it was a Blue Pansy male.

By prior arrangement with Binish, Gary drove the newly emerged butterfly promptly back to its original petunia patch at Mushrif Park – still a relatively peaceful nook, despite the holiday hubbub at the park, which at that hour hosted an estimated 2,000+ cars, 10,000+ picnickers and 30-40,000 chunks of kebab. The "young fellow" flew briefly onto the petunias but then settled down to bask in the sun on a large ornamental boulder nearby, folding its wings at intervals, until Gary left it about an hour later.

Contribution by Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas

Petunias at Mushrif Park (GRF)



The spiky black caterpillar of the Blue Pansy (GRF)



Blue Pansy pupa, enclosed in its chrysalis (GRF)



Fresh Blue Pansy male, wings folded (GRF)



Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

May 6: Dr John Burt and Noura Al Mansouri—"The coral masonry of Jazirat Al Hamra, Ras Al-Khaimah."

June 3: Dr Ada Natoli

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

May 5: Sustainable City

May 12: Gurudwara, Jebel Ali

June 15 to June 22: DNHG trip to Slovenia Mountains and Lakes (over Eid Al Fitr)

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Current Committee Positions Available

DNHG have the following (voluntary) positions available:

Field Trip Coordinator—a second Field Trip Coordinator is required to assist in organizing field trips.

Membership Secretary and Assistant Membership Secretary—this would suit a person or persons who regularly attend lectures.

Treasurer—this would require some basic financial knowledge.

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.