



GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Gary Feulner, Valerie Chalmers, Margaret Swan, Hiba Allam, Claudio G. Garzarelli, Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai, Ulrike Andorff, Dr Panos Azmanis and Oscar Campbell.

Send your contributions to be included in next *Gazelle* to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th April, 2019



The Desert Locust *Schistocerca gregaria* in Wadi Maydaq, early March 2019

Since the start of the year a number of members have reported sightings of large locusts from sites throughout the Northern Emirates, ranging from urban Dubai (Al Quoz, by Harold Bekker) to Wadi Hiluw (an IEW field trip), and including records from the Sharjah desert in between.

Grasshoppers and locusts (Family Acrididae) are not generally very easy to identify because the several nymph stages of individual species differ from each other and from the adults, and even adults may vary significantly in coloration and markings. In addition, there are few good comprehensive pictorial references, although Michael Gillett surveyed species found in the Al-Ain/Buraimi area in *Tribulus* 10.1 and volumes 3 and 5 of *Arthropod Fauna of the UAE* (A. van Harten, ed.) contain excellent field photos of many species.

In this case, however, the very large size of the insect limits the possibilities. The recent records appear to be *Schistocerca gregaria*, the so-called Desert Locust, of which *Insects of Eastern Arabia* (Walker & Pittaway 1987 – available on the DNHG website by kind permission of the authors and the efforts of the late Bob Reimer of Al-Ain) had this to say: "Enormous swarms sometimes occur in western Saudi Arabia and northern Oman, but are usually restricted to these areas."

Published photographs from the late 1940s and early 1950s (e.g., by Ronald Codrai) show locust swarms in Dubai, but this is not a phenomenon that most of today's UAE residents have seen.

Contribution by Gary Feulner



DNHG January field trip to some of the Sharjah Museums

(group photo taken at the Archaeological Museum)

Announcements and Recordors

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 7th April, 2019

Lecture Title - "Emirates Environmental Group (EEG) – Your sustainability partner
- focus on what happens to all the recycled waste EEG collects and more"

Biography - Vishnu Sunil Kumar - EEG Research Officer

Vishnu is an environmental scientist and a science communicator. He has research experience across many scientific disciplines, working to solve global issues in topics such as agriculture, space technology, energy, urban water management, air pollution, environmental remediation and tropical ecology. Vishnu's principal role at EEG is to conduct research, compile and prepare UN SDG implementation strategies in the UAE for governments, businesses and academic institutions. Vishnu also deal with business development, CSR implementation, preparing, compiling and editing monthly and yearly publications.

Annual General Meeting

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held in conjunction with our April 7 lecture. The normal March date was postponed due to the Committee's preoccupation with Inter-Emirates Weekend. At the AGM there will be a brief report on salient trends and events over the past year and on the DNHG's finances, and we will elect the Committee for the coming year.

The current Committee members have agreed to stand for re-election but this does not mean that your help is not welcomed or is not required.

The DNHG depends entirely on volunteer efforts and we are all busy, so help is always welcome. If you would be willing to help out in one way or another, please let a Committee member know.

In particular, **we need more members who are willing to lead field trips**, especially outdoor field trips. You do not need to be an "expert" to lead an interesting and enjoyable field trip. It takes a sense of adventure and curiosity – a willingness to look closely and wonder "What (or why) is that?" – and a willingness to share the experience. Good field trips are learning experiences for everybody – even the leaders.

From the Editor:

It's interesting to see how nature is observed in different ways and for different reasons. Read the report on page 6 to find out why man studied the natural world in order to find out the mechanics (or physics) of how each wing-type worked on animals, birds and insects.

It is such a pleasure to be outside whilst the weather is so lovely. Some members enjoyed a leisurely walk around the Creek area whilst others learned about flora in Sharjah.

During a beach walk, a rare sighting of a Frigatebird caused some excitement this week. Find out more on page 5.

Enjoy your read!

Grey Francolin

Thank you to those helping to identify the Grey Francolin (February, 2019, article by Gosia van Unen). Gary Feulner writes:

"It tends to live on the fringes of agricultural and suburban properties, in spite of which it remains very shy and is more often heard than seen. Its long and exuberant call is unmistakable. A confirmed ground bird, it is more likely to run than fly."

Dubai International Arabic Calligraphy Exhibition

This exhibition, which takes place every two years, presents powerful ideas that are related to Islamic heritage, as well as reflecting the region's cultural and social identity. This year it will be held at the

Wafi Mall

between

27 April—5 May, 2019

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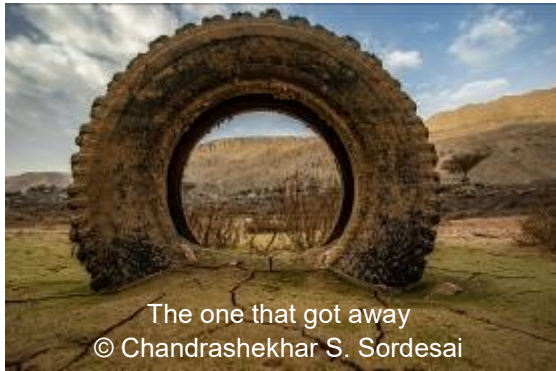
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Spotlight!

IEW winning photographs by Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai



The one that got away
© Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai

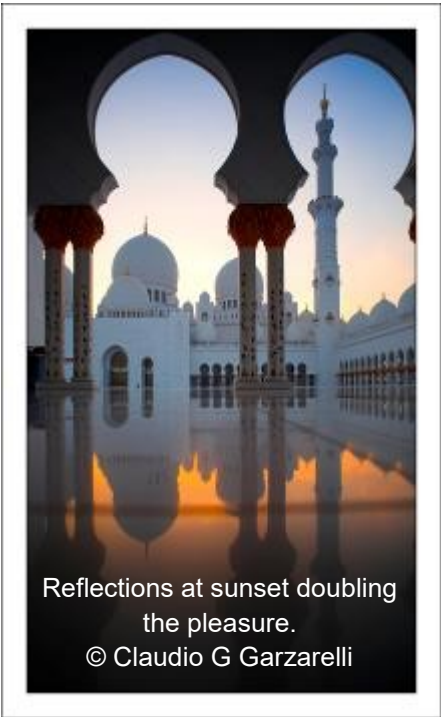


Speaking with forked tongue
© Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai



Sand Art
© Chandrashekhar S. Sardesai

IEW winning photographs, by Claudio G. Garzarelli (please do not reproduce without permission)



Reflections at sunset doubling
the pleasure.
© Claudio G Garzarelli



Pride and Love
© Claudio G Garzarelli



Marina wakes up after the thunderstorm
© Claudio G Garzarelli

Announcements

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2019 Gala Dinner

The Gala Dinner was held in the ballroom of the Centro Hotel, near Sharjah Airport.

A highlight of the evening was an illustrated talk entitled "Carsten Niebuhr and his Description of Sharjah" which was given by Peter Jackson, Architectural Advisor in His Highness, The Ruler of Sharjah's Office.

Peter's talk was followed by the presentation of the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for Natural History and the Bish Brown Award.

Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize

The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Prize for natural history is given to a person who has made a substantial, original contribution to knowledge of the history, natural history, culture, archaeology or palaeontology of the UAE, such contribution being reflected through means such as publications and lectures. The award was instituted by the ENHG Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, and comprises an inscribed silver dhow and a cash prize.

Huw Roberts has been a birder and wildlife watcher during his 25 years in the region (Turkey, Bahrain, Oman and UAE). He is an English instructor at UAE University, and his Master's degree was gained in Manchester University. He has authored and co-authored several articles on birds and other wildlife in the UAE, and is a voting member of Emirates Bird Records Committee. He is also an avid wildlife photographer. His web gallery (pbase.com/wildlifeuae) organizes, taxonomically, photos of nearly 1,000 authoritatively-identified species that he has photographed in the UAE. Huw recently conducted a survey of Ras Al Khaimah's mangroves area, but his special interest is Jebel Hafeet. He is currently nearing completion of a comprehensive catalogue of the fauna on Jebel Hafeet's west side. Huw has been working away in the background for quite some time recording biodiversity in Ain Al Waal, and is also a regular contributor to the UAE Birding forum. He is a co-researcher in a forthcoming publication on UAE butterflies.

Bish Brown Award

The Bish Brown Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to promoting wider interest in the objectives of the UAE's three natural history groups, through means such as educational activities, raising public consciousness in the media, playing a leading role in NHG activities etc. The award was endowed by former Vice Chairman, Terry Adams and former Secretary, Caroline Adams, to commemorate the founder of the ENHG, J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown. The award comprises a silver mounted eagle, to be held for one year by the recipient, and a cash prize.

Evan Jones has been tireless in his efforts to establish and maintain an NHG in Ras al-Khaimah. Although the institutionalization of the group remains a work in progress, Evan has overseen a programme of monthly speakers for most of the past two years, with audiences numbering in the dozens.

Finally, the prizes for the winners of the Inter-Emirates Weekend Photographic Competition were handed out.

This year's Inter-Emirates Weekend Photographic Competition saw several excellent and varied entries. See the winning photographs on the 'Spotlight' page. The winners of the individual categories were:



Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for Natural History was presented to Huw Roberts.



The Bish Brown Award was presented to Felicita Horning (left), who received the award on behalf of Evan Jones (inset) from the Ras Al Khaimah Natural History Group

PLANTS AND ANIMALS:

Chandrashekhar Sardesai: "Speaking with forked tongue"

GEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPES:

Chandrashekhar Sardesai: "Sand Art"

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE:

Claudio Garzarelli: "Reflections at sunset doubling the pleasure"

CULTURE:

Claudio Garzarelli: "Pride and love"

POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION:

Chandrashekhar Sardesai: "The one that got away"

The Winners of the top three photographs were:

Claudio Garzarelli: "Marina after thunderstorm" (Landscapes)

Claudio Garzarelli: "Pride and love"

Chandrashekhar Sardesai: "Speaking with forked tongue"

This year's competition was kindly sponsored by

Explorer.

Each of the winners received two books from Explorer "UAE Visitors' Guide" and "Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque". Each of the winners also received a Dh100/- **Magrudy's** gift voucher. Many thanks to Angela Manthorpe for organizing this.

Contribution by Valerie Chalmers



Field Clips

Frigatebird Sighting

My neighbour Jo and I were very excited to spot a large and majestic bird gliding over the Jumeirah 1 public beach on Monday evening (about 6pm). In the 13 years we have been in Dubai we had never seen such a bird. It had angular wings, a forked tail and a red patch on the throat. It seemed to be using the air currents to glide and hardly flipped its wings.

We did some research on the 'net and think it could have been a Frigatebird. Unfortunately neither of us had a camera to capture the moment. I thought I would let you know of the sighting all the same. I would be curious to know if anyone else has spotted such a bird in Dubai/ the UAE?

Contribution by Hiba Allam (see box below for more information)

Image of Lesser Frigatebird credited to:
www.nzbirdsonline.org



The above sighting was circulated to bird experts for identification. Dr Panos Azmanis confirmed that the description fits that of a Frigatebird.

Oscar Campbell, Chairman of the Emirates Bird Recording Committee, elaborated as follows:

"A likely candidate is Lesser Frigatebird, which is fairly widespread in the tropical Indian Ocean and quite easy to see in eg the Seycelles. LF has reached Oman (several records), Israel, Yemen and maybe even Kuwait as I recall. There are also c10 records in the Middle East of frigates that were not put as identified to species. Great Frigatebird is also in the Indian Ocean (rarer than Lesser) and a possible vagrant, whilst several other species (Christmas and Ascension Frigates) are also theoretical possibilities - frigates are such amazing flyers, blowing around the tropics of the planet on the wind, that you wouldn't want to discount any of them for certain. The separation of all 5 species is extremely difficult and would be pretty much impossible by an inexperienced observer (I include myself in that category; I have not seen too many) without a clear photo."

Khor Fakkan: Something new is awaiting you soon...

The soon expected completion of the new highway through the Hajjar Mountains will take you from Sharjah to Khor Fakkan within 45 minutes. Apart from four lavish fountains at the south access to the jewel at the East Coast, several recently started developments will make this town even more attractive to its residents and visitors. Shurooq has been working hard over the past months to enhance a 3km corniche strip with not only dining facilities and shops but also sporting activities such as two large courts for ball games.

Furthermore, near the historical site, a citadel or fort is being erected in traditional architecture and is supposed to be completed by mid-April 2019. It will house a museum with local artefacts and an archaeological exhibition. Behind and next to it,

The Al Adwani Tower



several old houses are being restored in original design to host a souq. Next to the port, a hill has been "re-built" together with the watch tower "Al Adwani" which was flattened many years ago. Taking the mountain road to the port, you notice also road works up the steep hill to the watch tower Al Rabi. An archaeological highlight will be the excavation and restoration of the Khor Fakkan city wall. The directional signs are already posted and car parks created to cope with the influx of tourists. Sharjah Government sets yet another example to create a destination with focus on heritage and modest enhancements.

The Citadel or Fort



The Souk



Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

Field Trips

If you have ever wondered why King Abdul Aziz Street in Sharjah is so long and straight, wonder no more! In fact, it used to be the region's first runway!

Our party had good reason to visit the Mahatta Museum over the IEW weekend, as the father of one member was an engineer, posted there in the 1960s with the RAF (Royal Air Force).

Recognising the flight control tower at the entrance, we knew we had found the right place. Beside it, an old passenger aeroplane could be seen, jutting out from a wall of what was presumably the old airport hangar.

Once inside this hangar, an array of vintage aeroplanes were neatly arranged, some of which were suspended from the ceiling. We also found that visitors can actually enter the afore-mentioned, juttied-out aeroplane to view it from the inside. We saw that several instruments lined the cockpit and noticed that each passenger seat had its own ashtray built into one of the armrests!

A gallery of photographs occupy the walls of what were once guest rooms. Passengers could spend the night here, prior to continuing on their journey the following day, depending on the wind and weather-related conditions.

Anemometers and various other measuring instruments, maps and logbooks were also exhibits. There was even a 'working' turbojet engine, where the moving internal parts could be seen. Budding engineers can watch a video [here of how this works](#).

The father of another member of our group was also stationed abroad in the RAF during the 1950s, though not in Sharjah. His job was to produce the two and four-bladed wooden propellers, used on early aircraft. Therefore, it was interesting to see so many of these smoothly carved objects displayed in and around the museum.



white documentary showcased the early airport operations in Sharjah.

To find out more about the museum and its opening times, visit:

<http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/Our-Museums/Al-Mahatta-Museum.aspx?lang=en-US>

Watch the early developmental days of 'Those magnificent men in their flying machines' and [the glamour of early flight travel here](#):

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Vintage Aviation



Airport hangar displaying vintage aeroplanes



A 'working' turbojet engine

The museum isn't all about aeroplanes, however. Another large area of the museum covers flight in general, including man's journey to the moon! Here, information about insects, birds and other flying creatures can be gleaned from a variety of media. Schoolchildren can sit around a large table, in order to record and present their research.

Another first for the area, aptly named 'Sharjah Paramount' was a cinema located in the airport grounds. The audience would watch footage of the time whilst sitting on upturned fuel cans, weighted with sand.

Towards the end of our visit, we too were ushered into a small cinema (with comfortable seats) where an old, black and



Wooden propeller

Field Trips

Yellow-Lipped Sea Kraits

Yellow-lipped Kraits (*Laticauda colubrina*) were a highlight of the DNHG trip to the Andaman Islands a few years ago. We first encountered them by night on the beach at Wandoor and we were puzzled by these colorful snakes, banded black and silver, which crawled out of the sea, onto the beach, and then climbed up and nestled among the uprooted stumps and roots of large shoreline trees (most of them probably uprooted by the tsunami a few years before).

It took a few days before the mystery was solved, when we read about this snake in the visitors center at a local nature preserve. A recent scientific account, published in *Journal of Threatened Taxa* and reported in *The Hindu*, presents the results of a study that was underway, coincidentally, at the time of our visit. More than 800 snakes were observed in 181 visits to this 680-meter stretch of beach over a four year period. Most were Yellow-lipped Sea Kraits but about 1 in 20 was a Blue-lipped Sea Krait.

Sea Kraits hunt for their prey among coral reefs but they are terrestrial snakes, not sea snakes (which cannot climb and are relatively helpless out of the water). They spend a lot of time underwater, but they must return to land to digest their prey, lay eggs and even slough their skin. Like our DNHG group, the researchers found the snakes by night and mostly on dead wood and the many large, uprooted stumps of the mangrove tree *Manilkara littoralis*.

According to the study authors, "The uprooted trees in the Andaman Islands provide a very unique environment which sea kraits have habituated themselves to." It was therefore disappointing to learn that the local authorities had removed the uprooted trees after the end of the study to "clear the beach for tourism purposes". As the researchers note, this is likely to have "negative repercussions" for the Sea Kraits locally.

Sea Kraits are found throughout the coastal seas of Southeast Asia. They have potent neurotoxic venom but are not considered to be aggressive snakes. In any case, they are not the only potential danger to beachgoers at Wandoor, as evidenced by other warning signs in the area.

Contribution by Gary Feulner

Uprooted tree stumps at New Wandoor Beach



DNHG visitors observing Yellow-lipped Sea Kraits by night



A beach sign warning of salt water crocodiles in the area

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- April 7: **Vishnu Sunil Kumar** presents "Emirates Environmental Group (EEG) – Your sustainability partner - focus on what happens to all the recycled waste EEG collects and more"
- May 5: **Gosia van Unen** presents "Through the Sands of Colour: Landscape Diversity of Saudi Arabia"

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- April 10—13 Keshm Island
- April 11, 12/13: Daymaniyat Islands, Oman
- May 3-4: Overnight dhow trip to the Musandam

Field trip details will be circulated to members via e-mail

DNHG COMMITTEE 2018

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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DNHG Gazelle

Field Reporters

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 2018 to September 2019. 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.