



GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دورية للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Ulrike Andorff, Ocean and Harold Bekker, Gary Feulner, Gosia van Unen, Margaret Swan, Natalie Hore, Kathy Topp and Alexis Biller.

Send your contributions for the next Gazelle to:

gazelleeditor@gmail.com

by 25th May, 2019

Reflections at Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary



Sea Treasures

Wind Storm at the East Coast

As an eager sheller you always hope for a storm to bring in treasures of the sea. My dream became true at the beginning of March when we experienced heavy west winds for 14 hours with gusts of 60km/h. Awaiting the low tide I went out for beach combing and was rewarded. The majority of shells had the animal still inside which was highly interesting to explore. After a brief examination the shells were returned to the sea. The result was not quantity but quality with two 13cm spiny murex shells, a fresh *Fusinus townsendi*, a yellow-coloured *Clamsys livida*, a good size *Mammilla sebea* and sand dollars etc. The shell highlight was one similar to *Haminoea cf vitrea*, a very fragile thin shell in the shape of an olive shell. This has since been identified as *Akera solute*. Website 'Sea Slug Forum' further states that "Akera is a primitive representative of the *Anaspidea* (Sea Hares). (thanks to Andrew Childs for identification). I found 3 new sea urchins and 3 starfish which I haven't seen before. Unfortunately, I am unable to identify these due to lack of documentation. If anyone knows the species or has relevant web links, I would appreciate if you can share these with me. In the meantime I hope for many more storms to come!



Sea Cucumber

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

(see more of Ulrike's finds on the Spotlight page)

Announcements and Recorders

Monthly Speaker - 8pm on Sunday 5th May, 2019

Lecture Title - "Through the Sands of Color - Landscape Diversity of Saudi Arabia's Deserts."

Biography - Gosia van Unen holds M.A. degrees from Adam Mickiewicz University, University of Chicago and the Poznan School of Management. She spent almost 20 years in the Middle East working and pursuing her passion for geology and nature. Over time she accumulated extensive resources in the field of geology, flora and fauna and history of the region. She collected, studied and documented fossil and rock samples to better understand landscape evolution and consolidated her findings in a recently published book "Through the Sands of Color: A Comprehensive Guide to the Natural World of Saudi Arabia." She writes about nature and art in the Middle East along with pursuing her artistic career.

We will embark on a journey through the diverse desert landscapes of Saudi Arabia seen from the perspective of geological processes that helped to create them. From their formation, through weathering and erosion, the landscapes are being transformed into an endless variety of structures. We will explore sedimentary landscapes of the Arabian Shelf (coastal regions, sand deserts, wadis and escarpments) and igneous and metamorphic landscapes of the Arabian Shield (volcanic harrat, mountains, the Tihama and the underwater realm of the Red Sea). There will be plenty of images of flora and fauna in their natural habitat as well as rocks and minerals.

The presentation is based on 9 years of exploration of Saudi Arabia's interior (and counting...)

A selection of fossils and rock samples will be available for viewing during the presentation.

From the Editor:

The window cleaners seen here on a high-rise building, heralded the end of the rains—or so I thought!



That photo was taken on 6th April but the remainder of the month was certainly very rainy for the UAE. Parts of the mountains are looking pleasantly green. See the intricate shells thrown up after a recent storm on the East coast (*cover*).

Featuring in *Spotlight!* are more descriptive examples of the East coast shells. There are also photos of birdlife at Ras Al Khor and wildlife at Sir Bani Yas Island.

The dhow trip to Daymaniyat Islands on 12/13th was diverted due to adverse weather warnings but members still enjoyed activities within the calm of the Bhandar Khayran fjords.

An article about Sir Bani Yas Island has been written by our next speaker, which you will find on page 6. Enjoy your read!

Annual General Meeting

The DNHG's AGM was held at the monthly lecture on April 7. Chairman Gary Feulner reported that membership continues at levels consistent with our highest totals for the new millennium. He thanked the speakers and field trip leaders who have contributed to our unique program offerings, but emphasized that more volunteer field trip leaders are needed to ensure a full program during the cooler months. Current Committee members were re-elected for the coming year.

Ideas for field trips, activities and assistance in any way from the membership are always welcome. Please contact any member of the committee if you wish to help.

Sharjah Museums

The following exhibition ended on 27th April!

Crossroads: Cultural Exchange between the Islamic Civilization, Europe and Beyond Exhibition—ends 27 April 2019 Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization

However, details of current exhibitions and events held at Sharjah museums can be found at:

<http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/Events.aspx>

DNHG Recorders

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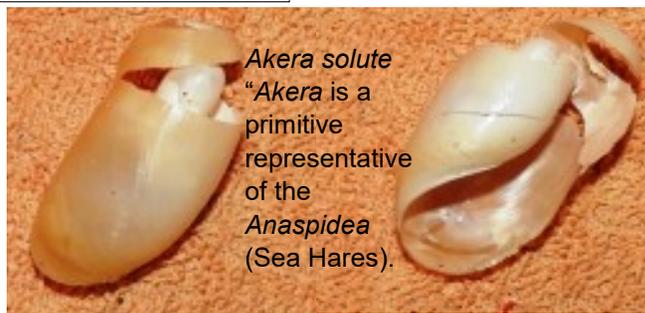
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Spotlight!

Sea Treasures, by Ulrike Andorff



Spiny Murex with animal



Starfish with giant arms



Babylonia spirata with animal



Ras Al Khor Birds, by Margaret Swan, with thanks to Oscar Campbell for confirming identifications.



(from left to right, top row)

Great Egret, Reef Heron (dark morph), black-winged stilt—waders looking for an early dinner.



(from left to right, bottom row)

Great Egret in flight, Greater Flamingo feeding. Paddling his feet to disturb the creek bed, he then filtered for nutrients within the muddied waters.



Life on Sir Bani Yas Island, by Gosia van Unen



Field Clips and Trips

Ant-agonism

A chance observation reminded me of the little known dramas that play out on a daily basis in the world beneath our feet. I was scouting the flat, sandy periphery of the Botanical Gardens at Sharjah Desert Park in advance of a recent DNHG field trip. Just ahead of me I spied a small, wriggling, twitching black mass.

I had two choices for closer inspection: (1) I could have knelt down and used a magnifying glass at close range. Inexpensive plastic models available at most stationery stores are generally satisfactory for field use, but the looming presence of an up-close observer can often alarm the subject and cause it to flee or disrupt the behavior that is being observed. Or (2) rely on close-focus binoculars. Mine focus at a distance of about 5 feet (1.5 meters) but close-focus models are not easy to find; this feature is often not advertized.

In this instance I chose binoculars and quickly saw that the writhing mass was a medium-large black ant whose motor ability had been disturbed or disrupted in some way. It seemed to be intact and could stand and walk normally for a body length or two, but then it would convulse violently, often even turning on its back. When it stood, it never did what most ants seem to do – move along determinedly in a chosen direction.

I continued to watch and saw that the wriggling ant was being contacted intermittently by individuals of a second, tiny black ant that passed by. Most seemed to "touch and go" but two or three always seemed to "hang on" – which explained why I was having difficulty getting a clear view of the exact size and shape of the bigger ant, whose very large jaws were evident but apparently ineffective against the smaller attackers. In the end I resorted to close-up tactics as best I could, and took a number of photographs to record the phenomenon.

My best interpretation – and the most obvious one – is that the larger ant had somehow stumbled into the wrong place and been attacked and partially disabled, neurologically, by the stings of the smaller ant(s). But this is speculative and I have not researched the spectrum of possible interspecific ant-to-ant relationships. If anyone knows better, I would be happy to hear more.

I found it noteworthy that the larger ant was not overrun or carried off by individuals of the smaller ant (of which modest numbers were patrolling the general area), yet it was always engaged by two or three of them. Given the apparently painful and disabling effects of these attacks, I wondered why it was necessary to continue them. Is the effect only temporary? Why would the victim (in these circumstances) not quickly depart the area if given the chance? As usual, more questions than answers

Contribution by Gary Feulner



(Photos) A large ant is attacked by several smaller ones

Daymaniyat Islands—Trip Diversion!

Weather warnings diverted the group to Bandar Khayran - the first DNHG trip to this destination! Bandar Khayran is a cluster of bays, fjords and islands, similar to Musanadam, but not as well-known. It has some excellent snorkeling places and coral reefs like the ones at Daymaniyat.



Sailing to Bandar Khayran was safer as it is along the coast. Surrounded by the deep fjords, Bandar Khayran remains protected from wind and waves. It was an ideal alternative location for this weekend and despite the inclement weather warnings, members were still lucky enough to enjoy snorkeling and water-based activities.

The rain started during the return journey—and it certainly fell that afternoon. In Ras al Khaimah, almost 400 people were stranded on Jebel Jais, according to the Gulf News.

Read more on the rains [here](#).

Field Clips

Beauty on the Mountains

Quoting the words of our Chairman Gary Feulner: "Enjoy it while you can! You are in an environment that is different from most others in the world, yet relatively safe and easy to access—and still not so well known,"

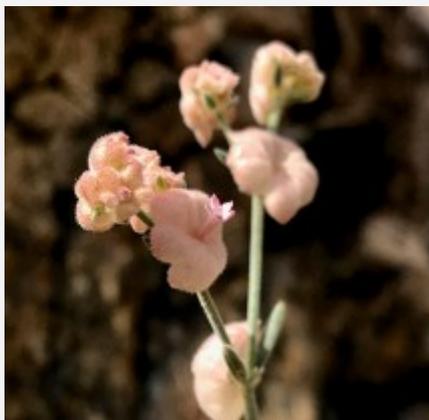
These photos will give readers a glimpse of the beauty encountered when exploring the Hajar mountains near Hatta during the recent winter months.

Thank you to Gary Feulner in identifying the species.

Contribution by Harold and Ocean Bekker



Flowering *Caralluma arabica* - now *Desmidorchis arabica*.



Pseudogaillonia hymenostephana "Popcorn plant"



Orobanche aegyptiaca Noteworthy because, as far as we know, only the second documented record within UAE territory. The first was a patch of plants found on a DNHG field trip about 6 years ago. The Gazelle article in the March, 2014 issue, states that "We were able to identify it by Marijcke Jongbloed's *Wildflowers of the UAE*."



Ammophila sp. "Matchstick Wasp"



Junonia (Precis) orithya "Blue pansy butterfly"



Glossonema varians



Papilio machaon



Vanessa cardui cardui Painted Lady

Field Clips

Salt Dome of Sir Bani Yas

We recently visited Sir Bani Yas Island, now home to luxury resorts and a savanna-like reserve for animals. *The first inhabitants were from around (or just before) 7,000 years ago from Neolithic times (like those elsewhere). The Bani Yas Tribe settled (perhaps) in the 16th Century. The island continued to be used at least seasonally until after the 2nd World War. (This article has been edited in italics. With thanks to Peter Hellyer for clarification).*

The Bani Yas tribe left the island at least a century ago because of lack of resources. This all changed when Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan made Sir Bani Yas Island his personal retreat and established a nature reserve on the island for animals native to the Arabian Peninsula such as striped hyena, cheetah, oryx, ostrich, sheep, gazelle and many other endangered species. Numerous orchard plots were established as part of a desert agricultural research program and there are almost 3 million various trees planted on the island such as acacia and frankincense among others. The resorts are teeming with gazelles, peacocks, guinea fowl, francolin and hyrax. All the greenery has been planted here and the water comes via an underwater pipeline from Ruwais on the mainland.

However, Sir Bani Yas is also a site of a famous salt dome. There are several other salt domes in the UAE, such as the islands of Delma, Arzana, Qarnain, Zirku and Sir Bu N'Air and on the shore, Jebal Dhanna. The salt dome of Sir Bani Yas is accessible to visitors exclusively through the guided Wadi Walk at the Anantara Resort and even though it creates time limitations for geology enthusiasts, the walk is an otherworldly experience not to be missed. A salt dome is a mushroom shaped or plug-shaped diapir made of salt with an overlying cap rock. Salt domes form as a consequence of the relative buoyancy of salt when buried beneath other types of sediment. The salt flows upward to form salt domes, sheets, pillars and other structures. Hydrocarbons are commonly found around salt domes because of the abundance of traps created by salt movement and the association with evaporate minerals that provide excellent sealing. Sir Bani Yas diapir was created around 150 million years ago, when triggered by tectonic movements, the salt migrated upwards, pushing up and disrupting the overlying sediments. Sir Bani Yas salt dome is 6000m thick and 1500m in diameter. Dissected hilly landscape is a result of a salt dome emplaced together with the Miocene bedrock. The oldest rocks in the area are those of the Neoproterozoic Hormuz Complex (around 600 million years old) and contain a range of clasts from 1 cm to over 500 m in size, including limestone, dolomite and igneous rocks. The sediments it carried to the surface and igneous rocks are left as an insoluble cap and are forming amazingly beautiful hills in a rainbow of colors. The colors are caused by the presence of minerals like magnesium (purple), copper (green), sulphur (yellow), iron (red) and the shiny hematite (black).

As stunning as it is the salt dome is not an easy place for life and there are hardly any plants or animals in the area. Therefore one can fully appreciate the landscape of "painted earth" without any worldly distractions.

Contribution by Gosia van Unen



Field Trips



Hanging Gardens, Buraimi

Some members camped overnight in preparation for the early start of this all-day hike. Led by Angela Manthorpe on 19th April, this location is a vegetation-rich alcove under a cliff of Jebel Qatar, in Buraimi (on the Omani side). These photographs were taken by Alexis Biller.

DNHG Trip to Qeshm Island

A small group of DNHG members visited Qeshm Island from April 10—13. All felt that the trip was very well organized and a great experience all round.



Guest house

It was fantastic to visit the open-air dhow and seafaring museum in Qeshm where we learned about traditional boat-building methods, which are still being passed on to the younger generation.

We made friends with the locals and other travellers wherever we went.

Visiting Naz Islands was a treat—particularly avoiding the rising seas levels due to the tides.

Star Valley was amazing with such

interesting landscapes all created from erosion.

The photo above was taken in the courtyard of our the guest house. *(written by Natalie Hore)*

Kathy Topp sent the photos on the right. Kathy writes, *"I felt that it was an amazing experience which I enjoyed very much. The local music on the dhow was very unique. It was a snapshot from the past."*

Contribution by Natalie Hore and Kathy Topp



Star Valley



Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

- May 5: **Gosia van Unen** presents "Through the Sands of Color: Landscape Diversity of Saudi Arabia"
- June 9: **Greg Simpkins** from the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (title of talk to be advised)

Scheduled Field Trips (Members only)

- May 3-4: Overnight dhow trip to the Musandam

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2019

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, an amazing photograph or community news to share?



A variation of iridescent-coloured flies, feeding on fallen honeycomb in Buraimi, by Alexis Biller

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 the monthly meetings.

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.