

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members'

These Irrepressible Women!

For the second month in a row, **Johanna Raynor** has earned the Chairman's Gold Doubloon – this time for dead fish. On November's field trip in the mountains near Hatta, Chairman Gary Feulner was explaining that the UAE's wadi fish cannot aestivate in mud or gravel when their pools or puddles evaporate. Instead they die. But Gary admitted that, despite intermittent inspection over a number of years, he had yet to actually see any dead wadi fish in a dried pool. Moments later, Jo turned over a rock in the low point of a recently dried gravel puddle, revealing the wrinkled but identifiable forms of several dead fish – proving, incidentally, the conventional wisdom.

Pam and John Cole have written from the UK that they were envious of those who went on the Ras Al Hadd trip. However they are consoled by their plans for a seven week trip arranged to NZ from late January to early March. Their daughter Liz, who is in Wellington, has arranged to walk the Milford Track with Pam while John and her partner, Andy, keep themselves busy in Te Anau. Sometime after that they will be off to a festival in Blenheim and a few days in

Please note: Our January meeting will be at JESS!

Our January Meeting will be held on **Sunday, January 18**, and will be held at **Jumeirah English Speaking School (JESS)**, where we met until 2002. Timing is as usual: doors open at 7:30pm for an 8pm start.

Go off Sheikh Zayed Road at the second interchange, towards the Union Co-op and Choithram's. Do a U-turn at the lights by the supermarkets, and come back towards the second interchange. Take the second right then first left.

Or take the last right before the lights at Choithrams and Union Co-op if you are coming up Al Wasl Road towards Dubai.

When you get to the school, you have to wander through between the buildings until you reach the gym, usually the only place which is lit.



the Abel Tasman National Park before touring the North Island.

DNHG Membership

September marks the start of the new DNHG membership year. DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Lloyds Bank account no. 173746 posted to us at PO Box 9234, Dubai. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Please take a minute at the next meeting to ensure that we have full contact information for you, including an e-mail address, so that we can advise you more efficiently of additions and changes to our schedule, and other matters. The DNHG does not share its membership or e-mail information.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.

This month's Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports:

Arfan Asif, Gary Feulner,
Marijcke Jongbloed,



Field Trips & News

Something Different...

Freshwater stream trip with
John Burt
16 January 2004

This trip is being organised by Jo Raynor and for details you can contact her by email at joray@emirates.net.ae

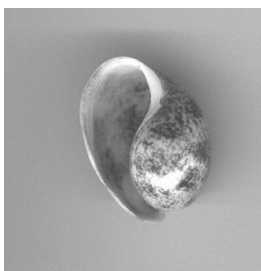
And maybe...

Pearl Diving in Bahrain
Feb/March.

Some interest has been shown in a trip to Bahrain to have a look at the pearl diving industry and to go diving / snorkelling ourselves. Because it is a relatively expensive undertaking, we would need very definite numbers, a firm commitment, and money in advance. We would plan to take a weekend, and may be able to get a discount for a block booking for the flight. At present, there are unconfirmed rumours of cheap flights.

A company called Aquatique runs a Padi diving centre and boats, and has equipment for hire. Proof of diving certification is required prior to hire of any life support equipment. Hire charge applies whether used or not..

There are three wrecks and three coral areas suitable for snorkelling. Day trips are offered, and if diving you can see some 30 species of coral and in excess of 300 species of fish. The water temperature varies from 34C to 18C.



Hudson Donates Archeology Library

Peter Hudson, whom many DNHG members will know as a neighbour, has been a Dubai resident and prominent local architect for more than 25 years. In his spare time he is also an enthusiastic and knowledgeable amateur archeologist with a special interest in stone tools. He was particularly active in the "early years" and his pioneering efforts were among those that prompted the professional surveys which discovered the Ad-Door and Jebel Buhays archeological sites.

Peter has recently donated to the DNHG Library a collection of books and papers on archeology, including both general texts and dictionaries as well as more specialized works on UAE and regional archeology.

Peter has also entrusted to DNHG custody a representative collection of stone implements from various UAE coastal and inland sites, mostly smaller flint tools (flakes, bifacials, microliths and arrowheads), along with site information and brief annotations. Most of these are believed to be some 5,000 or more years old.

The intention of the DNHG collection is to provide examples of what to look for and to facilitate recognition of man-made implements versus natural formations. Examination shows that it is not always easy to be sure. Peter notes that the sample implements include many that were collected in his "early days," without detailed notes of location and context. Peter's principal collection, fully documented, has been donated to the Sharjah Archeological Museum

It is a pleasure to acknowledge

Our Next Speaker

Dr. Kenneth Glennie has had a distinguished career in geology and is an expert on both desert environments and the mountains of the UAE and Oman. He was born of Scottish parentage and following military service studied geology at Edinburgh University. Thereafter began a career of some 23 years with Shell International.

Early in his career he worked in New Zealand, the Canadian Arctic and Rockies, and Nepal. In the 1960s he conducted intensive research on desert environments in order to better understand the Rotliegende reservoir of NW Europe. This led to an influential textbook, *Desert Sedimentary Environments*, published in 1970. During that period he also did field work in Turkey and in the poorly studied Makran and 'Crush Zone' of Iran, areas that would prove valuable to an understanding of the geology of the UAE and Oman.

In the early 1970s he led the study for which his name is most famous in Arabia – the Geology of the Oman Mountains, which mapped and interpreted the mountain regions of the UAE and Oman from the Musandam to the southern Omani coast at Masirah island. Those of us who travel in the mountains today still marvel at that feat, conducted before current vehicle access, in part by helicopter, and on occasion at some risk due to incipient rebellions in the wake of the change of power in Oman.

He then returned to the UK to work on North Sea exploration and at Shell's central office in the Hague. He "retired" from Shell in 1987 but continued to teach courses on North Sea petroleum geology and do consulting work. He was named an honorary lecturer and professor at Edinburgh University and supervised student research in the UAE, incl. stud-



Our Next Speaker continued...

studies of the Liwa oasis and the Sabkha Matti. In the 1990s he published several papers on the plate tectonic evolution of the Oman Mountains (Hajar Mountains). He is working on a book about the deserts of southern Arabia and an atlas of the Permian sedimentary basins of NW Europe.



anticipate that the stone implements will join our library collection at the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management.

Turtle-Watching at Ras Junaiz

The Al Areesh Camp in the Wahiba Sands was home for the first night of this 'Eid holiday trip. The camp is situated in a delightful location on the edge of the impressive dunes of the Wahiba Sands. After supper and entertainment by local musicians, we retired to spacious fixed tents (huts) with single beds.

The next morning, after breakfast, some members went dune driving whilst others enjoyed a camel ride and visited the local Bedouin who had come to sell their wares. The group then set out for the turtle beaches at Ras Al Junaiz. Most made a detour en route to Wadi Bani Khaled, described in the guide books as one of the most picturesque wadis in the interior of Oman. This was particularly nostalgic for Anthony and Julia Ussher, who first visited as newlyweds in the mid 1970s. The wadi lives up to its description, but being 'Eid it was very crowded and it took

some patience to get up as far as the rush-lined pools. A green water scorpion was spotted in a small pool and provided some interest!

The main group continued through Sur and then south for another half hour or more down the graded track to Ras Junaiz. Those who went via the southern coast were treated to an unusual landscape of multicolored rock poking up through a coating of sand dunes (in this instance, blowing sand dunes). They found, however, that this route is paved all the way to Ras Junaiz and Ras al-Hadd. A detour at Jebel Ja'alan revealed some two dozen Hafit tombs on low hilltops as well as high grade metamorphic rocks eroded from the core of the jebel, unusual within the mountains of Oman.

At the turtle beaches we stayed at the Al Naseem Camp, just a short distance inland. After a delicious supper we headed for the beach at 9:30pm to see the green turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs. Being 'Eid, the main beach was very crowded and so Ali, our camp manager, took us to another beach where we were very fortunate in being able to watch several turtles coming ashore, laying eggs, and one or two returning to the water, with fewer people around to disturb them. "Stay together, no lights" was the order of the day (or night?) Several newly hatched baby turtles were spotted in the dark. These were collected for show in the skirt of a dishdasha and then placed with care at the water's edge. A couple of hours later we were back at camp for the night, but we rose again at 4:30am, leaving camp at 5am with Ali to watch the last turtles and hatchlings return to the sea.

One female turtle who had a deformed back leg (the result of a shark attack?) had some difficulty climbing out of her burrow. She was gently helped by Ali who also gave her a reassuring pat every so often. Once in the sea she swam off easily. Many baby tur-

ties were seen making their way to the sea, occasionally having to surmount the formidable obstacles of large, deep burrows in the soft sand. Sandi Ellis was rewarded for her patience by the sight of several baby turtles successively emerging from the sand at a single nest.

As the sun rose over the Arabian Sea they were helped on their way by members of the group. This is a dangerous time for the babies due to predators on the look out for them. Many sets of tracks made by foxes, and at least one by a cat (probably domestic) were spotted near the turtle nests. Sea birds, mercifully, were not much in evidence. Did the presence of tourists discourage them and give the babies a small advantage? It was a wonderful experience being there to see the turtles, old and young, return to the sea.

The "Cheerfulness in the Face of Adversity" award went to Dieter and Ingrid Stanik and their daughter Sinnika, who up to this point had endured a major automotive breakdown and camera malfunction without any noticeable dampening of enthusiasm.

The DNHG group began their own return journey by different routes. Several took the scenic coast road from Sur to Quriyat, which has much to offer. About 22 km from Sur is the mausoleum of Bibi Miriam, surviving from the golden age of the Hormuz trading empire.

Letters to the Editor

Any news or views you would like published in our monthly newsletter? Feel like tickling things up?



Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or e-mail, or direct to the editor of *Gazelle*.



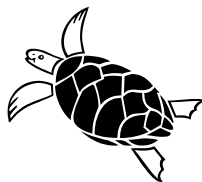
Field Clips

E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them to Anne Millen on floppy disk at monthly meetings.

Although damaged, it is substantially intact and is the only building remaining from the ancient port of Qalhat which was razed by the Portuguese in 1507. Further north are the towns (and wadis) of Shab and Tiwi. Exploration of Wadi Tiwi was forgone by most, because on that day it was very crowded (again because of 'Eid). Moreover, under any circumstances, the narrow and sometimes difficult track in Wadi Tiwi is not recommended for convoys.

One group had a picnic lunch on the beach not far from Bimah and spent some time observing the crabs. Beyond Bimah is the Bimah Sink Hole. It is about 40 metres across and 20 metres deep. The sink hole is an example of karst activity where the groundwater has dissolved the limestone below the surface until the exposure is too wide to support the weight of the overlying rock and the roof caves in. Those who had not visited it before descended the concrete stairwell to have a closer look. The graded coast road became a tarmac highway near Quriyat and they continued on to Muscat, visiting Mutrah Souq en route and meeting up with most of the original group at the Safer Hotel Suites, where they stayed the night before returning to Dubai.

Chairman Gary Feulner stayed on in Sur for an extra day to invade the privacy of intertidal molluscs and to scout a few hiking routes near Tiwi and Shab. Gary extends the group's thanks to Chalmers organization, accom-



Val for ing direc-

"Buttons" and "Birthstones" in Mountain Settlements

One november weekend I ascended with DNHG veterans Mike Lorigan and David Palmer from Wadi Khabb Shamsi to the ridges overlooking the east coast of the Musandam above Khor Haffah, where Mike and David had visited the previous week with the DNHG dhow trip. For the ascent up a steep gulley, it helped to know there was a trail (when in doubt, follow the goat droppings), sometimes more precipitous than I remembered (this was even more true on the way down), but with stones helpfully placed by the Bedu to fill in the missing spots.

At abandoned settlement areas higher up (there are also some newly refurbished dwellings), I saw something I not seen before: in many places the ground was littered with shells of the sturdy, turban-shaped intertidal mollusc *Lunella coronata*, including its large, hemispherical, opalescent operculums, which resemble imitation pearl buttons. I have never encountered this shell in mountain settlements before (or in any coastal shell middens, for that matter), but I infer that it is (or was) common in Khor Haffah, just an hour's walk below (at Bedu speed). I also infer that it was eaten, since I cannot imagine another use that would leave the shells and operculums to be discarded intact. But why only here, when I know the species is not uncommon on rocky east coast beaches. Is the sheltered Khor Haffah so much more conducive to the growth of the species? Or perhaps to its convenient harvesting?

We also encountered, descending from a circuit of the ridges, only my second example of what I call provisionally "birthstones" – a discrete area of hillside with vertically oriented stones wedged in cracks in bedrock or propped up by other stones, or in a few cases cairned.

The stones are mostly obelisk-shaped, or tall triangles, or narrow tablets – distinctively narrower than typical gravestones. Moreover, these stones are clearly not associated with graves. The first time I saw something similar was near the village of Al-Alamah, high above the large but isolated coastal town of Limah. A local resident traveling with me explained, as best I could understand, that these stones were put up on the occasion of a person's birth. I would welcome any reliable information about such a custom, which, now that I have seen it repeated, I hope to explore with my Shihuh friends.

Despite a wind on the ridgetops at about 40 knots, the villages and vistas made it a delightful day, so much so that, most uncharacteristically, I had to be the one to remind my companions when it was time to start down, in order to be off the slopes by dark. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Skyscraper Birdwatching

An eagle attracted attention at Emirates Towers in early November, soaring to the north and east on several successive mornings. We are accustomed to kestrels coming and going from the office tower, but this bird was sufficiently large and distinctive that even our CFO took time out from his bean-counting to stand up and watch.

I had to refer to Clark on Raptors, but I reckon it was an immature Spotted Eagle, probably one of the several reported at Dubai Creek by Twitchers' Guide (www.uaeinterac.com) during the same time period. From the 28th floor I had only top views of the bird, which was dark brown with a white rump and white "stitching" along the center of the wings. It is difficult to distinguish the immature Spotted Eagle from immatures of the Steppe Eagle and the Lesser Spotted Eagle, but both of the lat-



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
res 344 8283
off 344 0462
fax (off) 349 9437

Archaeology - Prof. John Fox
jfox@aus.ac.ac

Birds - David Snelling
res 3517187
fax 2950758
050 – 5526308

david.snelling@emirates.com

Seashells - Sandy Fowler
res 344 2243
fax 344 2243
shellerdoc@yahoo.com

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res 06-5583 003
off 06-5247 958

lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res 349 4816,
fax 340 0990

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Mammals - Marijcke Jongbloed *until someone else volunteers.*

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

ter ought to have had a slightly paler brown mantle, which I did not see.

The Emirates Towers grounds are also an excellent place to see Hoopoes (in summer) and Grey Francolins, including families. One hopes, of course, that the latter are not the attraction for the migrating eagles. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Through the Lens ...

As the dumpsite at Wimpey Pits, my favourite haunt, gets filled, one cannot help feeling sorry for those hundreds of lives that depended on it. Wimpey Pits was the best kept secret by the twitchers of UAE.

During my sojourns to this place, opposite the Sewage Treatment Plant on the Awir Road, I had the



good fortune to capture some memorable nature shots. Gary Feulner, David Snelling, David Bradford and many regulars will miss it as Chinaplex comes into being.

The overflow from the Sewage Treatment Plant made, with time,



quite a big lake accommodating great number of grebes, ducks (mostly mallards), plovers, stilts,

harriers, flamingoes, and swans early this year. As well, there were many insects, such as dragonflies and damselflies, that helped to make it a very healthy ecosystem. This was proved quite convincingly with increased breeding particularly of grebes and many new discoveries at this site. Ruddy's Shelduck was the 'bird of the day' in DNHG's last outing to Wimpey Pits led by David Bradford.

In comparison the overflow near Larry Woods Dumpsite next to



American University of Sharjah has in recent times led to the death of many birds. I am no expert to judge the reasons, but the sight of so many birds dying, in particular the gulls, is disturbing. I dislike taking pictures that portray suffering. But, like such pictures in



times of war, they show reality and get across a message.

Text and Photographs by Mohamed Arfan Asif





Reports...

Book Review:



Emirates Bird Report No. 20

Emirates Bird Report No. 20, compiled and edited by Colin Richardson, is a catch-up volume that summarizes UAE bird records on a species-by-species basis for 1995-2000 and brings this formerly annual series more nearly up to date. For rare bird reports, the volume is current through summer 2003. This is especially important because the past several years have brought us a wealth of new species with each migration.

Also included are written reports of the first sightings of a number of species, a graphic index of monthly sightings (a picture is worth a thousand words), occasional graphs of comparative figures from year to year, and the UAE results of the Asian Waterfowl Census conducted annually in the UAE's wetlands from 1996 through 2000. At the back of the main list are introduced species and escapees, many of which continue to survive, if not thrive, in local parks and landscaped grounds, some to a greater extent than indicated by the records.

Publication was sponsored by the Ports, Customs & Free Zone Corporation of Dubai, and by the Emirates Natural History Group, Abu Dhabi, who deserve our thanks for their support of this addition to our collective knowledge about the natural history of the UAE.

For those whose principal interest is in ticking off new species on their life lists, this volume will alert you to what has been seen and where. But there is greater virtue in a comprehensive publication of data for several years, in that it has the potential to elucidate trends and patterns that may be of interest to students of ecology, behavior, migration patterns and timing, and biogeography. In many instances the authors have commented on apparent trends, especially population or range expansion or decline. This compilation greatly amplifies the value of the information provided by individual birdwatchers.

It is useful, nevertheless, to be aware of various factors that may influence the generalizations that come out of records such as these, but that are not expressly acknowledged in the volume itself. These include, among others, (i) the increase over time in the number of observers reporting to the Emirates Bird Records Committee, fueled in part by regular visits by foreign birdwatchers and foreign commercial birdwatching tours; (ii) the influence of several years of relative drought on species numbers and diversity in wild areas (affecting 1998-2000); (iii) a continuing dearth of reports from mountain areas, and perhaps even a decline in the number of such reports (with the result that Jebel Hafit and Qarn Nazwa(!) are among the most frequently mentioned mountain sites); and finally (iv) the fall-off in the number of observers each summer (which, as much as anything, may account for the absence of summer sightings of two admittedly "elusive" or scarce resident birds that are restricted to "wild" areas, the Long-Billed Pipit and Desert Eagle Owl).

The individual records often make surprisingly interesting reading for both birdwatchers and general

naturalists. Thus, one can learn that three barn owls were seen chasing a cat at a UAQ roundabout, an hour after sunset one September. Or that House Crows are limited to coastal towns and have yet to gain a foothold in Abu Dhabi, being seen there only in single digits through 2000. Among the many items that were news to this reviewer was the regular occurrence of the Hoopoe Lark at coastal sites, e.g., Khor, Dubai, Khor Al-Beidah, Dreamland beach and Khor Kalba. Occasional comments seem excessively diplomatic, as when the Brown-Necked Raven is said to be "declining due to disturbance and development of desert areas" whereas the "reason for decline at its Jebel Hafit stronghold is unknown."

The volume does not have an index, so it is helpful for readers to know the "birdwatcher's alphabet" – the standard taxonomic order for listing bird species – but for those who do not, the table of monthly sightings serves as a relatively convenient guide. A gazetteer is included (albeit with idiosyncratic spellings) and most place names will be recognizable to those who have traveled around the UAE.

Copies of *Emirates Bird Report No. 20* are available at Dh. 70 from Magrudy's Bookstore and its outlets, or from the Emirates Bird Records Committee, P.O. 50394, Dubai. Make cheques payable to Colin Richardson. E-mail: colinr@emirates.net.ae. Report by Gary Feulner





	name	tel home	tel office	fax
Chairman	Gary Feulner	306 5570 messages: 306 5300	330 3600	330 3550
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	349 4816 e.mail: vmc@latifaschool.co.ae.	no calls pls	340 0990
reasurer	Jen Robinson	050 – 5982494 e.mail: fcek2@emirates.net.ae (attn. P. Robinson)		
Membership Secretary	Lena Linton	344 2591 e.mail: linton@emirates.net.ae		344 2591
Membership Assistant	Anindita Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: anin@emirates.net.ae	050 – 714 4893	282 0703
Speaker Co-ordinator	<i>Desperately needed</i>			
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Pradeep Radhakrishna	282 3952 e.mail: wgarnet@emirates.net.ae	050 – 450 8496	282 0703
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	David Snelling	3517187 e.mail: david.snelling@emirates.com	050 – 552 6308	295 0758
Special Projects	Beryl Comar	344 2243 e.mail: comar@emirates.net.ae		344 2243
Member at Large	Sandy Fowler	344 2243 e-mail: shellerdoc@yahoo.com	no calls pls	344 2243
Newsletter Editor	Anne Millen	269 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	no calls pls	269 1654
Publisher	Peter van Amsterdam	269 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	335 5495	269 1654
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Chief Engineer	James Pardoe	394 3821		

News from Marijcke

Marijcke writes, from her retirement house in France, "I had a remarkable experience this morning. As I sat at the breakfast table I heard a strange noise, a squeaky noise that sounded quite mechanical. I got up to try to determine what caused it and found to my surprise that it was strongest just below the skylight. When I opened it, it became much louder and was now identifiable as the sound of many, many birds! I went outside and saw that three high trees in the forest behind my house had thousands and thousands of birds in them. The sound was incredible as was the sight when a group took flight. Just 50 meters further down the valley there is a "palombiere" - a pigeon shooting hide. Whenever a shot sounded the birds' noise was interrupted for

a fraction of a second, to resume immediately. The birds did not take flight when they heard the shots. I could not identify them for certain but I think they were thrushes (I think that mainly because I heard yesterday that that is what the hunters shoot now that the pigeons' migration is almost over)

Earlier this week I saw a flight of over 200 cranes, which was also impressive - and their calls were hauntingly beautiful.

The newspaper reported that more than 2 million pigeons have crossed southern France this year. They also reported that the flightpath of the birds has changed compared with previous years. Instead of flying across the Pyrennees via one of two passes

that were always used and where they were very vulnerable to hunters, they headed for the southwestern corner of France, made a brief detour over the sea and continued their flight overland to southern Spain and Portugal. The Spanish hunters who had been ready to hit as many as pigeons as they could on the passes were left with "pigeon-shaped emptinesses" - more power to the pigeons! Luckily the cranes are not a legal target. *Thanks to Marijcke Jongbloed for this report.*

(The editor has seen a similar thing. On the very day that the duck-shooting season opens on Lake Karapiro, New Zealand, thousands of ducks invade nearby farms where shooting is illegal.)

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Jan 18: Geology of the Hajar Mountains and Plate Tectonic Evolution – Dr. Kenneth Glennie
[Note: **Our January lecture will be held at JESS. See directions page 1.**]

Feb 08: The World of Julfar – Christian Velde

Mar 07: Jebel Buhays: the UAE's oldest mainland archeological site – Hans-Peter Uerpman

Field Trips (DNHG members only, please).

Dec 24-27: Saiq Plateau Hiking and Touring – Gary Feulner et al.

Jan 16: Fresh Water Life with John Burt and Johanna Raynor