

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Members' Achievements

DNHG member **Mohammed Arfan Asif** was honoured twice at the Suvarna Karnataka State 'World Photography Day' celebrations held on 19th August 2007 in Bangalore.



He received an award for his services to the Youth Photographic Society, Bangalore from the Directorate of Youth Services & Sports, Karnataka State Government.



The second award was for achieving international photography distinctions from ARPS (Associate

Royal Photographic Society, UK), AFIAP (Artiste of International Federation of Photographic Art (UNESCO affiliated, Italy) and AICS (Associate Image Colleague Society International, Calif. USA). Congratulations, Arfan!

The DNHG's (only) Namibia-based member, **Peter Cunningham**, has recently been promoted to Deputy Director and head of the Department of Nature Conservation at the Polytechnic of Namibia. Congratulations, Peter!

The DNHG Committee was pleased to kick off the new season with a packed auditorium and many new members for the group at our September lecture. A busy programme of field trips is being put together for the cooler months (see pp. 2, 8), and members are encouraged to suggest, participate in, lead, and write up group trips and activities.

Unless you have specifically requested a hard copy version of *Gazelle*, you will receive it electronically. This simplifies distribution considerably for us, and you get it fast and in glorious colour. Make sure you give us your email address, even if you do not want an e*Gazelle*, because trips and events announced between issues are advised by email.

DNHG Membership

It is now membership renewal time. New memberships and renewals are good for the coming year (Sep 2007 to Sep 2008).

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 TSB Bank account no. 173746. (Please note we *cannot* cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

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 and contributions:

Barbara Couldrey
Val Chalmers
Angela Manthorpe
Sandy Fowler
Gary Feulner



Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan



Out and About Again! An excellent line-up ...

Birdwatching - Dave Bradford 5 or 6 October

This will be at one of the many good spots handy to Dubai but Dave has to see first where there is no construction going on! An email will confirm the date and advise location and details.

Al Ain Zoo by Night - ENHG 19 (& 20) October

This is a combined NHGs visit to the zoo's exhibits during the late afternoon and then at night, when a lot of the animals are much more active. We will have dinner around 7pm halfway through the visit; people can choose to visit the zoo restaurant or bring their own picnic dinner. The director will put on a bird show for us at 8pm. If you choose to stay overnight at a hotel, we will spend Saturday visiting some archaeological sites and doing an oasis walk in Al Ain (Please bring passports in case we venture into Buraimi). Contact Val Chalmers to register: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com and she will confirm the date as soon as possible.

Mangrove Walk - Gary Feulner 26 October (if the tide is right)

Gary will confirm the date and give details closer to the time.

Shelling - Sandy Fowler 16 or 17 November (TBC)

This will be a day trip somewhere along the long coastline of the Emirates - Sandy knows the nooks and crannies, and will supply details at the meeting or by email.

Ibri & Ibri Anticline - Val Chalmers et al 23-24 November

This is a two day, possibly two night, trip into Oman and includes Ibri Fort, Sulayf, an exploration of the anticline and if time permits, a look at the Bat Tombs. Details not worked out yet.

Birdwatching - Dave Bradford End November

Dave will lead a second trip when all is new and different because of the cooler weather.

Wadi Bih - Pradeep Radhakrishna 7 December

This is an all day trip up over the Hajar from Wadi Bih to Dibba Oman. You will visit a spectacular mountain village en route and possibly take a swim at the end.

... a Spectacular One ...

Sundarbans - Pradeep & Anin Radhakrishna Eid al Adha 19 - 23 December

Members would leave Dubai on 19th Dec, spend one day in Kolkata, travel to the Sundarbans on 21st, tour and study the delta environment until 23rd, returning to Dubai that day. Small group only (15 people max), so please let Anin know of your interest as soon as possible: anin@emirates.net.ae

... and a worthwhile project!

Wadi Hatta Clean-up 24 November, 9:30 am

Sandra Knuteson, from American University of Sharjah has suggested a joint DNHG-AUS litter clean-up of Hatta Pools.

Sandra explains, "I am in need of a clean Hatta Pools area for a preliminary research project on environmental quality and management at off-road tourist destinations. On National Day weekend, I want to show the impact of tourism on the Hatta Pools. If we can clean up the area before the National Day weekend, I can sample for litter and water quality before & after (Thursday & Tuesday) the holiday to show exactly how much of an impact one holiday weekend can have. I am requesting the

DNHG to help with the litter clean up, as well as help transporting students from the Environmental Program of the American University of Sharjah (AUS). Our school buses will not go to the Hatta Pools area, therefore I especially need volunteers with extra seats in their vehicles. If you are interested in helping with the litter clean up, contact Sandra Knuteson (sknuteson@aus.edu); please include the number of students you could take. I will provide litter clean up supplies & water.

"Where: Meet in the main circle, directly inside AUS's main gate. I will email a map.

"The day I'm proposing for the field trip is in "Clean Up The World Week". The theme this year is: One World, One Eco-System, One Humanity." Sandra Knuteson sknuteson@aus.edu

Our Next Speaker

Tom Bailey was brought up on a dairy farm in Surrey, UK. He graduated from the Bristol Veterinary School in 1991, completed his PhD at the University of Kent, 1999, an MSc in Wild Animal Health in 2002, and an RCVS Certificate in Zoological Medicine in 2002.

Tom came to the Emirates as Resident Veterinary Officer at the National Avian Research Centre, Al Ain, 1993 - 1999. He was a Senior Veterinary Officer with ER-WDA for five years and Deputy Manager of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital for three. From 2002, when he completed his MSc in London, he has been Wildlife and Falcon Veterinarian at the Dubai Falcon Hospital and Wadi al Safa Wildlife Centre. He is Editor of Falco (see www.falcons.co.uk) and of Wildleft Middle East News (see www.wmenews.com).



Seek & Ye Shall Find

Dr Sandy Fowler visited one of Jumeira's beaches (he calls it chirpologist beach, members may know it from previous news and trips as Mercato beach), opposite the Town Centre, on Sunday 9th September. Although still hot, the north end of the beach had good shells both in quality and quantity and Sandy was pleasantly surprised to find some "family pairs" on the beach.



Sunetta effosa and Sunetta donacina



Callista erycina and Callista florida



Acrosterigma lacunosa and Acrosterigma maculosa

Sandy was absolutely delighted to find one shell that was a great surprise: *Tellinella adamsi*.



Tellinella adamsi

He has only found one possible specimen in all his years of beach trawling and to see it on the beach nearest his home was "a lesson in humility, especially when Bosch records it from the Northern Gulf only. Search your own backyard first!"

Good specimens of *Decatopecten plica* were also plentiful.



Decatopecten plica

Sandy does not actively collect as such any more, and so if any members of DNHG would like some of these shells to add to their own collections, I will be happy to pass them on. I can be reached at: sandyfowler@gmail.com home - 04-3442243 mobile - 055-9123594 (Beware! He often doesn't bother to switch it on.) Thanks to Sandy Fowler for text and pictures, and for his offer of specimens.

Go to Dhofar in the Khareef...

Despite the fact that the official dates of the khareef in Dhofar are 21 June - 21 September, it is all a matter of degree. In early Septem-

ber, Dhofaris apologies for our having "missed" the khareef, but it seemed to be still there, at least for heat-blasted travelers from Dubai. The rain had ceased, but the surf roared in with multiple breaker lines, pouring mist over the beaches and through the gardens and town. Up in the semi-circle of hills, Jebel Dhofar, that gives Salalah Plain and its own southern slopes a micro-climate dramatically different from the rest of Oman, creepers threatened to overwhelm the luxuriant growth of large plants and trees. Over the jebel, of course, it is desert as usual.

In Wadi Darbat, above the now somewhat diminished falls, plants had taken over every bit of land, even little islands in the Darbat pools.



To the left, *Impatiens balsamina*

Val Chalmers identified *Impatiens balsamina* as best she could from photographs, and using *Plants of Dhofar - Traditional, Economic and Medicinal Uses* by Anthony G. Miller and Miranda Morris. She learned that it is the sole representative of the genus *Impatiens* in Arabia, where it is restricted to open habitats in both grasslands and woodlands in Dhofar. It has erect, fleshy, rather translucent stems, and a pink, 'orchid-like' flower. *Impatiens balsamina* comes up in great profusion during the monsoon rains, and the fruits are eaten by thirsty livestock in the rainy season when cattle and goats obtain most of their moisture requirements from the lush pastures. Bores now supplement this source of water.

At an early stage in their development, the flower stalks are twisted through a full 180 degrees, so that



Email your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) and send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver them to Anne for scanning.

at maturity, the flowers are 'upside-down' with the lowermost petal at the top and the uppermost petal at the bottom.



Flowers of *Impatiens balsamina*

The fruits dehisce explosively when touched, and the seeds are dispersed up to a metre from the plant, giving rise to the common name 'touch-me-not' for this and other species of the genus. Small glands on the leaf petioles exude a nectar-like substance which attracts ants. It has been suggested that the ants might ward off flightless leaf-eating or nectar-robbing insects.

Medicinally, the juice of this plant was squeezed directly into and around the eye for inflammation, and it was apparently a very painful but effective treatment in a variety of ophthalmic conditions! The whole juicy plant was used as a wash for body and scalp.

On the slopes above the blow-holes at Mugh sail, in the west of Dhofar, a variety of plants clung to life in conditions very different from heights of the Dhofar mountains. Conditions

are fairly wet as well, but from mist and salt spray which is blown up from the huge waves crashing against the limestone cliffs.



Tough grass grew right on the edge of the cliffs, and most of the seed heads looked black (except in the photographs!).



Perhaps *Zygophyllum simplex*

Further back, perhaps 25 metres from the cliff edge, an assortment of grasses, succulents and other plants grew, but Val was unable to identify them conclusively from her reference text.



Some seemed to thrive on the salty gravel, but unfortunately were not flowering, hindering identification.

Val was almost sure that she recognized *Indigofera coerulea*, a member of the pea family, and an important plant in Dhofari culture. Another species, *Indigofera articulate*, is also widespread in Dhofar and the two are very similar. *I. coerulea* is a low-growing plant commonly found in the low plains area, and was cut and used for dyeing but with a much simpler process than that used to produce indigo. It was

usually used on thick unbleached cotton imported from India for clothing, and on leather articles. The resulting colour was a blue-green shade which was not stable and faded in the sun and with washing. The roots, crushed to a paste, were used on snake-bites as well as other bites and bee-stings, as an analgesic and anti-inflammatory.



Indigofera coerulea to the left

Thanks to Val Chalmers for tackling the unenviable task of identifying these, and for sourcing the information from: *Plants of Dhofar - Traditional Economic and Medicinal Uses*, by Anthony G. Miller and Miranda Morris. Photographs by Anne Millen

... but Don't go to Dhofar for the Shells!

For years I longed to go to Dhofar in the khareef because I imagined that the beaches were littered with interesting shells thrown up by the vigorous wave action. Go to Rams beach, RAK, after a blow or even to Dubai's beaches, and you will find more, and better, shells. But no, not in Dhofar. The khareef is altogether too much! The beaches were almost bare of shells, and those that did turn up had been around a few times; they were well beyond identification.



In one sheltered little area, I did find what Sandy calls a "family pair", two species of *Donax*, surprisingly fragile to have survived those seas. *D. scalpellum* is commonly found on



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Archaeology - David Palmer
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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
email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Mammals & Seashells - Recorders needed!

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.



Dubai beaches, and I rather think I have found *D. nitidus* as well, though *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* lists the latter only for the Gulf of Oman and Masirah Island. (But that can be because we have failed to report it or it has not been positively identified.)



Donax scalpellum



Donax nitidus

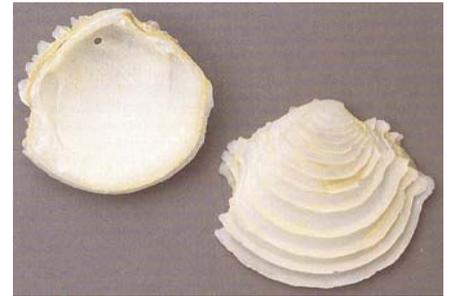
Photographs by Anne Millen

Oh, Those Taxonomists!

Those members who find taxonomy a perpetual source of mystery and wonder might enjoy this extract from correspondence between John Taylor of the British Museum of Natural History, Dick Hornby and Gary Feulner.

"The species named *Lucina dentifera* in the bivalve part of the Bosch et al book is now called *Lamellolucina oliveri*. *L. dentifera* is restricted to the Red Sea. The new genus *Lamellolucina* was neces-

sary because these bivalves look nothing like the type species of the genus *Lucina* - *L. pensylvanica* from the W. Atlantic. *Bellucina semperiana* is now called *Cardiolucina semperiana*. The genus name *Cardiolucina* has date priority over *Bellucina*. The two species should be relatively easy to tell apart. *L. oliveri* has no radial ribs at all and is usually much larger than the small, fat *C. semperiana* which has concentric lamellae crossed by radial ribs."



Lamellolucina oliveri,
previously *Lucina dentifera*
From *Seashells of Eastern Arabia*, by Bosch et al

Dick Hornby added, "John is also very keen to get hold of fresh specimens of *Anodonta edentula* (now called *A. kora*)."

So ... um ... if you are not now so confused that you cannot remember which end of the ... what's it? ... regulator goes where, start looking for *Anodonta ed...* um, no ... *kora*.

Delight on Our Doorstep!

For many divers the quest to see large underwater species such as manta rays, hammerhead and great white sharks, and the weird and wonderful sunfish, is a major driver in deciding where to take their next diving holiday. Interestingly, right on our doorstep, the Musandam is gaining an increasing reputation amongst the international diving community for its combination of dramatic, unspoilt scenery together with high energy sites which yield a host of pelagics.

Diving in the Musandam this summer DNHG members Steve and Angela Manthorpe have had several close encounters with whale



sharks. These plankton feeders are the ocean's largest fish, and can grow up to some 14 metres in length, and 14 tonnes in weight.



The majority of sightings in the Musandam have been juveniles of around 3 to 4m only and they have been observed several times around exposed headlands off some of the islands off the north eastern tip of the Musandam – sites that are subject to high currents especially. Having done several dives in the same locations over several weeks, and observed whale sharks on each occasion, Angela and Steve believe that they are seeing the same individuals. One in particular is host to around 20 remora of varying sizes – remora are fish that hitch-hike on pelagic fish and do not cause their host any harm.



The Musandam has certainly become more accessible to divers over recent years with fast boats, operating out of Dibba Al Hisn, that are capable of reaching the tip of the peninsula in around 2 hours, plus a number of air-conditioned dhows offering overnight trips. Whale sharks are a highlight but the opportunity to see dense shoals of big eye trevally, barracudas, eagle and devil rays and the occasional

black tip shark and sunfish is sure to mean that diving in the area will only grow over the coming years.
Report by Angela Manthorpe

Fells, Moors, Dales and two Seas

Barbara Couldrey completed Arthur Wainwright's "unofficial" coast to coast walk across England during the English summer. She wrote: The route starts at St. Bees Head on the Irish Sea and finishes at Robin Hood's Bay on the North Sea. It crosses en route the Lake District, the Westmorland Plateau, the Pennines, the Dale of Swale, the Vale of Mowbray, the Cleveland Hills and the North Yorkshire Moors. The length of the walk, which traverses three National Parks, is 190 miles depending on your orientation skills and correction exercises or your personal whims!



Barbara Couldrey in Westmoreland

As the route is not way-marked, one needs a compass, an up-to-date guide and marked up ordnance survey maps, often included in the guides. Wainwright's original description (1973) is worth the extra few grams in your backpack, for the sheer joy of matching up his wonderful line drawings with the visual feast around you.

The duration of the walk really depends on personal fitness and how you set about it. If you are prepared to carry your "bed and breakfast" on your back you are then free to stop more or less where you please, camping at friendly farms, in pub gardens or official camping grounds - around two weeks. If you do not carry camping gear, then an experienced walker can do it in 12 days. This, of course, means all accommodation is pre-booked and you

are under pressure to make your daily target come rain or shine. Whichever way, it is a wonderfully varied walk. From West to East (*with* the prevailing wind) one scrambles over the majestic Lake District fells with their challenging crags and delightful lakes, where paths are sadly suffering from severe erosion due to the popularity of this whole area.



Ennerdale, Lake District

Then, as a complete contrast, one strides out across the limestone plateau (1,000m contour) to Kirkby Stephen, passing prolific evidence of prehistoric and primitive settlements and negotiating passages through the ubiquitous stone walls dividing farm lands. Beyond Kirkby Stephen is a climb up to the Nine Standards Rigg where the main Pennine watershed is crossed and Yorkshire entered. Until now all rivers and streams encountered flow to the Irish Sea, beyond they drain into the North Sea. It was here that I was thankful for sturdy leather boots and gaiters as we sucked in and out of peat bog on the gaunt, soaked fell – not a place to be in bad weather!



The Moors

Then again in complete contrast, we dropped down into one of Yorkshire's finest green dales – the Swale, with its farms, falls, cataracts and tree lined river with an abundance of wild flowers. But Wainwright quickly takes us back up onto the moors again past long



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Swaledale

abandoned lead mines and smelt mills, before dropping back into the valley again.

After leaving the Yorkshire Dales and before climbing up onto the awesome North York Moors, we spent two days tramping through flat farmlands, often chest high in ripe-for-harvest wheat and barley, scrambling over dozens of stiles and fastening as many gates. The many criss-crossing paths give public access to private property, thus

avoiding tarmac and the noisy disturbance of modern transportation.

The Cleveland Hills and North Yorkshire Moors were certainly a highlight for me. It is sometimes difficult to experience the solitude of a wilderness in England but here one was surrounded by rolling moors of purple heather and green bracken for as far as the eye could see, walking into and out of the clouds. And from up here we got our first glimpse of the North Sea down below, beyond the green farmlands and woods of delightful Eskdale, which spelt two more days walking (wet, as it transpired) to the cliffs leading to Robin Hood's Bay.

On such a walk it is sometimes difficult to stop and make time to study nature in detail, especially with a heavy pack on your back, but of wildlife there was plenty. There were red grouse galore on

the moors, common pheasants, an occasional raptor, the screech of gulls as we approached the coast, a lone deer, rabbits and ... yes, slugs ... by the dozen. They are abundant due to this year's wetter than ever English summer. But wildflowers survive and were prolific, lining most walkways in the valleys, some head high! There were also typical limestone rock gardens with mosses, ferns and delicate little flowers.



The North Sea Coast at last!

Thanks to Barbara Couldrey for text and photographs.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

- Oct 7 The UAE: Land of Falconry - Tom Bailey
Nov 4 To be confirmed
Dec 9 Evolution - Professor Michael Conlon

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside.)

- Oct 5 / 6 Bird Watching with Dave Bradford
Oct 19 (-20) Al Ain Zoo by Night with ENHG and Val Chalmers
Oct 28 (TBC) Ajman Mangrove Walk with Gary Feulner
Nov 16 / 17 Shelling with Sandy Fowler
Nov 23 - 24 Ibri and the Anticline with Val Chalmers
Nov 24 Wadi Hatta with AUS
Dec 7 Wadi Bih with Pradeep Radhakrishna
19 - 23 The Sundarbans with the Radhakrishnas