

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ الطبيعي

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Inter-Emirates Weekend 2009 Photographic Competition

Guidelines and Judging

The Inter-Emirates Photographic Competition is open to amateur photographers who are members of the Abu Dhabi chapter of the ENHG, the Al Ain chapter of the ENHG and the Dubai Natural History Group.

Participants are invited to enter a maximum of two (returnable) photographs, which have been taken in either the UAE and Oman, on natural history subjects. There are five different categories:

1. plants
2. animals
3. geology/landscapes
4. archaeology/architecture/ culture

There will be a prize for each category. Photographs should be a minimum size of 5 inches x 7 inches (125mm x 180mm) and should be mounted so that the photo can be displayed without damaging it (eg They might be 'blutacked' to a tiled wall.) Each photographer is requested to write the following information on the back of each photograph:

- Photographer
- Title of photograph
- Specify where photograph was

taken e.g. Dubai Creek and not UAE
Approximately when the photo was taken

Photographs may be handed to IEW 2009 organisers any time from Thursday 26th March until 5 p.m. on Friday 27th March and they will be on display prior to the buffet dinner on 27th.



The competition will be judged by everyone present. Each individual attending IEW 2009 will be given a voting form to vote for a winner in each of the five categories. The winners will be announced during the evening and then the prizes will be presented. **N.B. The photographers must be present at the function.**

DNHG Membership

DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. You can join or renew at our meetings or by sending us your details and a cheque made out to: Lloyds TSB Bank account no. 60600669933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

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:

Mohammed Arfan Asif
Barbara Couldrey
Mary Beardwood
Angela Manthorpe
Gary Feulner
Larry Woods
Jenny Hill



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



Coming Field Trips

Bastakiya Walk, Peter Jackson

18 April

This is a ramble through the very old areas near the creek mouth, with architect and wind-tower authority Peter Jackson. Not to be missed but ... only 24 people! Details by email.

Union Paper Mill Visit

1 May

This is a Friday trip to a large mill in Al Qoz that does paper recycling. They are allowing for a large group, so everyone can come. Details by email closer to the time. Pencil it in!

Inter-Emirates Weekend Thursday/Friday/Saturday 26/27/28 March 2009

Each year in March/April the UAE's three Natural History Groups – Emirates Natural History Group Abu Dhabi, Emirates Natural History Group Al Ain and the Dubai Natural History Group – get together for an educational yet social weekend involving a dinner and various activities and trips. It is a chance to meet up with people/old friends from the other groups. The event is organised annually by one of the groups in rotation. This year it is the turn of the Dubai Natural History Group.

IEW 2009 will be based at the Oceanic Hotel, Khor Fakkan and the programme will begin on Friday morning, 27th March (though there may be stargazing on the evening of Thurs 26th.) The hotel has made a block booking of rooms for the Thursday and Friday nights on a first-come first-served basis. However, in view of the increased tourism in Khor Fakkan and the peak season date of IEW, it will be necessary to confirm and guarantee your booking by the end of February 2009.



STOP PRESS : Lena has negotiated the following new, lower rates for Inter-Emirates Weekend at the Oceanic Hotel Khor-fakkan. These rates apply to **both bookings already made and to those still to be made:**

Single Room (Room only basis) Dh 350.00 per room per night
Double Room (Room only basis) Dh 430.00 per room per night

Single Room (BB basis) Dh 400.00 per room per night
Double Room (BB basis) Dh 500.00 per room per night

Cost of an extra bed in a room for an adult Dh 120. A suite can be booked but you need to ask the hotel.

On Friday evening there will be a buffet dinner (Dh 96 per person). Packed lunches will be available for Friday and Saturday – please arrange these directly with the hotel once you have been supplied with your booking reference.

It has been arranged with the hotel that all reservations should be made through the DNHG. To make a reservation, please email Lena Linton on linton@mailme.ae with your requirements as regards rooms and buffet dinner. Lena will email you the booking reference and then your credit card information will need to be sent to the hotel. If unable to use credit card, then to send a cheque to given address.

Summer!

Do you know of any interesting natural history trips for when it's hot in the city? Let us know what you'd like to do. You don't have to be an topnotch organizer or an expert - the Field Trip Coordinators will help you organize, and they might even find someone to provide information. Just let us have your ideas; we'll take it from there.

Trips will be many and varied. There will be two half-day trips up Wadi Wurraaya, a dhow trip, an insect workshop with Brigitte Howarth, shelling, mountain walks, forts, musea, archeological sites and ...

On the evening of Friday 27th we will be holding the Inter-Emirates photographic competition. The format of this is changed. Please see pp.6&7 for all the details you'll need.



Bull Fujeirah pushing,
Photo by Larry Woods

Our Next Speaker

Allestree Fisher has spent much of his professional life in education since the mid-sixties either in Europe, Africa or the Middle East. He and Pam met in France which conditioned their movements as they did their first degree in French, and two of their overseas posts were in French-speaking countries, Algeria and Niger. It was in Niger that Allestree became interested in (Sahelian) trees. Since then they have been in Uganda and Poland, both exciting places from a naturalist's point of view. In the UAE, their third Arabian posting, Allestree decided that the most engaging topic was the flora of the region, and quickly found his way round the wide selection of drought-resistant species that are here.

Allestree has worked as a teacher, teacher-trainer and director for the British Council, and is currently at Abu Dhabi Men's College. During his time in Abu Dhabi, he has been a major contributor to the ENHG as a field trip leader, speaker and tireless enthusiast. He is currently the Assistant Excursion Secretary, ENHG.



Email your field reports and news to pvana@emirates.net.ae (Arial 10 justified). Please send your photographs as separate jpg files, or deliver

Donkey Fox Wadi Walk

When I told a friend I was going on a trip named Donkey Fox Wadi, my friend exclaimed 'What, a donkey crossed with a fox?' ... I don't think she thought that one through properly but the conjured image is certainly interesting! The overnight camping trip, so named because donkeys and foxes were spotted on the first visit, was led by Mike Lorrigan, a long standing member of the Dubai Natural History Group who has led this trip many times in the past. After a delayed start where we all realised that arranging to meet on a Friday in Madam next to the mosque at 1pm was a bad idea, we headed off to a very interesting bivalve and gastropod fossil site affectionately named 'Gastropod Gulch' by Rosemary Leila, who was one of the first people Mike took to the site some years ago. These were apparently from the Cretaceous period dating from approximately 50-70 million years ago.



'Gastropod Gulch'

After an hour photographing and admiring the fossils embedded in the rocks we then went on to see the calcite formations. Created by a calcium residue, these resem-

bled a series of terraced pools trickling down the slope. A couple of dragonflies, some toads and fish were observed in and around these pools and we did our bit to help preserve these by picking up the litter left behind by picnickers.



Calcite formations

We then headed to the campsite, situated on a plateau above the wadi. Mike put out some food for the foxes and set up some impressive looking spotlighting equipment (we had wondered earlier how his car was so full when there was only him in it and we had four people in our car!) whilst we all put up our tents and got ready for the night.



Donkey Fox Wadi

Sadly no foxes were to be seen that night and more concerning was that the food was not taken at all - even during the walk when we were away from the camp. Mike saw foxes on his last visit, about seven weeks ago, when he had three sightings but says he has never had no appearance, or evidence of appearance, over nearly 24 hours which does not bode well for the health of the population.

The following morning we headed off for a 4 hour moderately rugged circular hike descending into the wadi and weaving our way through a maze of narrow paths with a few climbs up to the ridge. Interestingly,

we came across a mound of stones which turned out to be a small grave believed to be of Islamic origin from the orientation of the body. No donkeys were spotted making us think we might have to rename this trip to just Wadi... but we did see some droppings so they were obviously hiding from us! We also saw some smaller droppings which we thought might be gazelle but had no dung experts with us to confirm it. Towards the end was a number of small caves, one of which was partly blocked up so had probably been used as a hideout by hunters. As we got to the end of the walk we passed a well vegetated area, mostly dwarf palms, bringing us back to the cars. Thanks go to Mike for leading this interesting trip; it was enjoyed by everyone and I have had some great feedback from those attending! We will certainly try to run another trip towards the end of the year. *Report and photographs by Jenny Hill*

Accidents DO Happen!

Despite so many sorties into the Ras al Khaimah mountains, accidents do happen and Barbara Couldrey's number came up on 1 February this year. She wrote, "We had just started descending from the Jebel Yabana Ridge down to Wadi Bih when a large rock broke in half, hitting me and causing a tumble of six metres or so through the rubble. Two minutes before, as well as earlier in the day, I had commented that we should be careful of the rocks after the fairly recent rains and cold - they can become "uncemented"!"



Yabana Ridge



"I was very lucky – two knocks on the head only resulted in bumps, bruises and a cut needing a few stitches; there were further lacerations and many bruises, a twisted left knee and a very painful right groin. I stood, tottered and eventually with the aid of much adrenalin, the trusty shoulder/hand of my extremely competent mountaineering friend and my faithful wooden broomstick, we made the valley floor. It took over five hours of non-stop steep descent, the last hour down scree after sundown, to get us out.



The start down point is the farthest knob, centre ridge, with the scree slope in the foreground

"A long session in casualty determined that I had fractured my right anterior pelvis - ah! that was why I could no longer weight-bear on my right leg!

"We didn't have a mobile telephone with us, but it is likely that we would not have had any reception – a satellite telephone (eg Thuraya) is the only reliable means of communication. Also, I could actually move, albeit painfully, so we probably wouldn't have called for a helicopter.

"I always carry a basic first aid kit. Gauze swabs, bandages, anti-inflammatory medication and paracetamol were used immediately. I had a fleece, windbreaker and an emergency "space" blanket which would have kept me warm if my companion had had to leave me there to go for help.

"Regardless of the time of year, I always carry a minimum of 3 litres of water. I needed every drop this day because of the exertion.

"We didn't have our headlamps with us as an earlyish descent was planned – but that is no excuse! However, we had a very small moon and from past experience, unless it is an absolutely black night, it is better to use nature's illumination – we could see perfectly well and I only stumbled once.



Rock bands on the way up to Yabana ridge

"I don't remember much about the fall as it happened so quickly. However, my friend's description of the 'adventure' prompted the doctor's comment ... "a miracle". Thanks to Barbara Couldrey for this story, her photographs, and the reminder that we should always be prepared for the unexpected. Barbara noted that, perhaps because of the very cold weather, she has not seen the little poppies (*Papaver dubium*) this year. Indeed, there were no wildflowers yet.



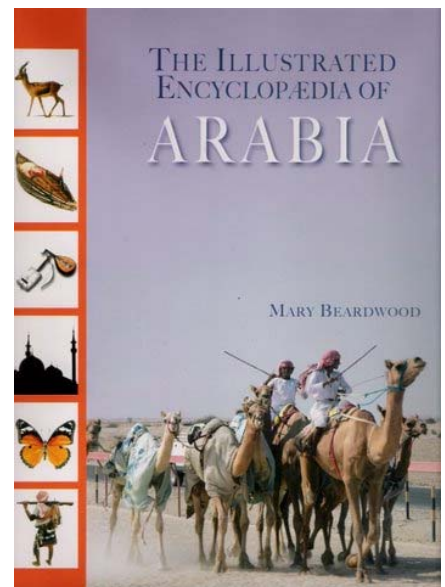
Papaver dubium

Book Review:

The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Arabia

Compiled by Mary Beardwood
Published by Stacey International, 2009.

Without the assistance of many members of Dubai Natural History Group I would have never become an author! People who were around in the years 1999-2001 will recall how I engaged the help of many of them to research an encyclopaedia, written especially for children and young people in Arabia. Eventually it was published in 2001 as *The Children's Encyclopaedia of Arabia* and with the addition of some updating, has been republished now with a slightly more general title.



To mention just a few members who were involved, I particularly remember Gary's meticulous approach to the insect information and the mangrove swamps, Sandy Fowler's wide ranging collection of seashells, Val Chalmers knowledge of fossils, Uli Wenery's unique association with the world of camels, Marijke Jongbloed's help with plants ... and Christian Velde taking the archaeological side of things under his wing. People who contributed wonderful photographs are too many to mention but their generosity brought the whole encyclopaedia to life.



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

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Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Seashells - Recorder 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.



To go along with the new encyclopaedia, this time called *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Arabia*, I now have a website www.arabia4you.co.uk I had a couple of wishes in developing this. The first was to produce a Teachers' Resource Pack to accompany the encyclopaedia, and the second was to give a platform for children to share their work, and anything new they had discovered. I think this might be a 'first' for schools, and I really hope it takes off.

To all new members of DNHG, I hope you find the new encyclopaedia (available at Magrudys) useful and entertaining. Its publication gives me another opportunity to express my gratitude to all who made it possible. *Thanks to Mary Beardwood*

Snail Call

A reminder, especially for new members: your unwanted garden snails and slugs are of interest for scientific study and an accounting of the terrestrial snails of the UAE. All specimens will be gratefully accepted by Chairman Gary Feulner, and contributors will be kept informed of progress and pedigrees. Suburban gardens are home to several native Arabian snails, but also a number of introduced species. There have already been a few surprises and we know that more are out there. Dead shells are preferred; we'll follow up if you've got something unusual. It's easy. Just bag 'em and tag 'em! Please remember to record the location and the habitat, as well as your name, the date, and any remarks.

Thru' the Lens

International photography salons (as they are traditionally called) or exhibitions continue to be the best avenue to share nature photographs. There are many advantages; importantly the photographs are judged by internationally acclaimed nature photographers.



Jebel Qatara

Pictures are assessed for content and technical competence and they are either accepted or rejected. Scores are reported to the participants and these are a fair indication of merit. I consider it is a privilege when photographs are assessed by photographers like Heather Angel, Art Wolfe, John Chamberlin, Nigel Dennis, John Shaw, Mark Plonsky, and many others. Of significance is the objective to reach out to a global audience and the honor to have our personal interpretations of nature stand alongside the best in the world is exciting.

Participating in innumerable salons since 1989 and successfully exhibiting in 29 countries, has helped me fine tune my photographs. Salon catalogues / brochures / souvenirs with the accepted pictures are of educational value in providing examples of the standards and styles of photography adopted by nature photographers all over the world. They are food for inspiration.



Musandam

Earlier, it was a difficult and laborious exercise to print large size photographs, mounting, packing and posting them with the fear always lurking at the back of one's minds that they may reach their destination crumpled, bent or, worse, lost in transit. Then the double fear that they may fail to reach us on return. Communica-



tion by snail-mail for months trying to trace lost packets was discouraging. The process was very expensive for the amateur. Posting pictures by surface sea-mail requires advanced planning. In addition sending entry fees for participation was a barrier. The amount, usually USD 7 - 10 in those days (presently USD 10 - 20) was difficult to send. The bank charges would be more than the fee in most cases.



Praying mantis

Now these hurdles have been resolved with the advent of digital technology. Most salons request photographs on CD, which is much safe and less expensive. Some have dedicated websites to download photographs or specific e-mails to submit them. Payment of fees can now be conducted using credit cards or PayPal. This has made participation very convenient and faster. Organizers now send their catalogues by e-mail, saving on time, printing costs and postal charges. Now without going to the photo printer, post office or bank we can participate in International nature salons to exhibit our natural history photographs. Check out the following two links for the latest on nature photography salons and exhibitions: www.entryforms-fiap.net and www.exhibitionforms.com/
Text and photographs by Mohamed Arfan Asif



Blackwinged stilt

Eagle Owl

Eagle owl perches were reported twice during the year-end holiday period, from locations along the Hajar Mountain foothills. Angela Manthorpe, sightseeing atop the Suhaylah hills, found a few large, regurgitated owl pellets plus an accumulation of rodent jaw bones and long bones. These she duly collected and passed to member and speaker Björn Jordan for a possible identification. The size of the pellets and bones favors the eagle owl as the responsible party. In recent years the local species has been distinguished as the pharaoh eagle owl *Bubo ascalaphus*.

A couple of weeks later, Narayan Karki flushed an eagle owl from among some rocks on a slope in the low hills north of Fili. The bird was distinctive in flight – large and barrel-chested, blunt-headed, with a noticeably short, striped tail. This particular one was a relatively ruddy colour, so that it appeared to represent the race *B.a. ascalaphus* rather than the paler *B.a. desertorum* which is considered to be the most common race in UAE desert areas. Narayan was able to track it back to its customary roost (or one of them) – a small cave sheltered from southerly exposure and large enough to accommodate a crouching human in the rain.



Eagle owl den

In and below the entrance were a collection of rodent jaws (all apparently the same species, and the same as those found by Angela at the Suhaylah hills) and long bones, as well as regurgitated pellets containing hair, some glossy-coated

capsules and other indescribable morsels – all duly inspected and gathered up for further investigation by Björn Jordan. Report by Gary Feulner

During a winter trip to the Umm A'Samim and the Empty Quarter in Oman, Angela and Steven Manthorpe, Gary Feulner, John Martin and Anne Millen camped one night in a sheltered col beside one of the last big dunes of the Empty Quarter, west of Haima. This is oilfield territory, a maze of good graded roads in which, without a GPS and way points, you might become marvelously confused. It is sparsely populated but there are scattered drilling camps, rigs and pipelines.

During our meal, as we sat chatting around the campfire watching John cook 'real' sausages with real dedication, Gary noticed a gerbil under his chair. We all watched in delight as he (and he is only 'he' for linguistic convenience) confidently hopped through our camp searching for food. Anne broke up some bread (Park'n'Shop's best spelt) and dropped it under the Manthorpe's table. The little fellow carried a piece off at speed. He was soon back for another. Angela tried to photograph him, but he was so quick that her camera often did not have time to focus. There followed a pause during which we concluded that he was easily satisfied, and lamented that we had not managed to get any photographs of him.

But no! We looked again to see that there was only one piece left! We broke up more ...



The gerbil with his bread



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... he dashed back and forth to his burrow over the sand dune and Angela, following him, managed to take some flash photographs. In all, he carried off three slices of bread.



The gerbil by his burrow

Finally, his appetite seemed satisfied and ours too, and we retired to our bunks. But the excitement of the night was not over; the flash of Angela's camera brought us a late night visit from oilfield security. They arrived in five vehicles and, after some discussions and a few difficulties with the soft sand, roared off ... right smack over the little gerbil's burrow! We were dismayed.

Next morning we realized that he was still with us when we counted more than 40 tracks over the sand dune separating our camp from his, and some in every corner of our camp.



Gerbil tracks on the dune

The resourceful little fellow had simply dug several back doors, done the camp over as thoroughly as he could, and was presumably sitting safely below with his family, enjoying the bread.

Looking at the pictures later, Angela was initially puzzled by their configuration. The front feet are

the ones closer together, the heavier, more widely spaced track the back feet. Then she realized that *one* set of tracks would look like this:



Thanks to Angela Manthorpe for photographs.

Look the Part!

The DNHG has navy blue sweat shirts, with the DNHG emblem embroidered in silver. Sizes: L & XL Dh65/- each, and silver grey polo shirts with the DNHG emblem embroidered in black. Sizes: M, L & XL Dh50/- each. The quality of both items is excellent! See Val Chalmers at the next meeting.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Sunday 5 April Allestree Fisher: 'Flora of the UAE'

Field Trips (Members only, please. Details inside, p.2)

26-28 Mar Inter-Emirates weekend

18 April Bastakiya walk

01 May Union Paper Mill tour

Further field trips, details and any changes will be announced by e-mail circular.