

GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعه

DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Members' News

Obituary

Geoff Cosson has written from Cyprus with news of the recent and untimely death of **Martin Parker**, a former DNHG Field Trip Coordinator and a teacher and administrator at the Rashid School for Boys. Martin was an active explorer of the deserts and mountains of the UAE in the blissful era before border checks and fences. He was one of the few people to have both driven across the Liwa crescent and hiked across the Musandam mountains.



Enjoying a hike, north of Jebel Yibir

After more than a decade in the UAE, Martin departed in 1997 for Cairo, where he became the Assistant Principal of a British school. Geoff relates that Martin left Cairo a few years back and set off traveling to places he'd always wanted to visit. However, during that time, he started to feel unwell and settled in Cyprus with his friend Josephine, getting a part-time job at a Field Study Centre, while trying to sort out his health issues. He continued to enjoy hiking in Cyprus but his health continued to decline and eventually he was diagnosed with bowel cancer. He returned immediately to the U.K, where he rented a flat near his sister in Exeter, undergoing all the usual therapies and operations, but the cancer was too far advanced.

Geoff confirms that Martin remained an optimist to the end, and was always interested in other people's experiences. This is how his many friends in the DNHG will remember him.

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.) **The cut-off for renewal of membership is January 31. See notice on p.2.**

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:

- Heidi Struiksma and the p.7 eight
- Geoff Cosson
- Rob Whelan
- Sue Hunter
- Gary Feulner



The Date Seller, Sana'a
Photograph by
Gary Feulner



Jebel Sumayni Hike Fri 28 Jan

Gary Feulner will lead a full-day hike to the summit of Jebel Sumayni, along the mountain front south of Madam. From the top, if the weather is clear, there are good views of both the mountains and the desert, including Jebel Hafit. This is an uphill (and downhill) walk. Total vertical rise is c.700m but there are no trails: we will be walking in wadis and on rocky hillsides, with one early stretch of scrambling over boulders. Walking time est'd 8-9 hours, medium pace (Gary is now past 60). This hike is best suited to experienced hikers or very fit and energetic novices. It is not a good first hike. Bring boots or sturdy shoes, minimum 3 litres of water, lunch/snacks, hat, camera, binoculars, torch (in case of emergency) and light jacket in case of wind, cloud or drizzle at the summit. Leave Dubai 6:30am, estimated return 7:30pm. Limit 12 people. 4WD required. For sign-ups, contact Gary at home (04-306-5570), office (04-331-6123) or grfeulner@gmail.com.

Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve Sat 5 Feb (day trip)

This will be a visit to Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (the expanded Al Maha Reserve) starting with a talk on desert conservation and research activities followed by a visit to the reserve and research programmes. Greg Simkins will conduct the tour.

You will need a 4X4 vehicle and sand driving experience. This is an area of big soft dunes. It will be limited to 5 vehicles only, and there is a Reserve entry fee. Pradeep will take registrations on a first-come-first-serve basis, but priority will be given to people who were already booked for 22nd January. Email wgarnet@emirates.net.ae



Kayaking in Umm al Qawain Fri 11 Feb (TBC)

We plan to hire the large boat (cost 120 Dhs/head) and from that use rented kayaks if required or bring your own, to visit the mangroves. We need a minimum of 20 persons, so if you book, please be reliable. Details to be settled and announced shortly.

InterEmirates Weekend, Liwa, hosted by ENHG Abu Dhabi 17-19 Feb

This is always a treat with a huge variety of activities. Tilal Liwa Hotel is providing the venue this year. Camping is also an option. Field trips and activities are already planned and will be sent out soon. It is very popular - make plans soon.

Donkey/Fox Wadi 25-26 Feb Watch this space.

Marble Quarry at Hijari near Sohar, Oman Sat 19 March

Hans-Joachim Rau will take members to a marble quarry in the village of Hijari and to the factory in Sohar. Details to be confirmed.

And on the agenda for 2011...

For the following trips, details will be published/mailed as soon as known, but pencil them in now:

Forts of Dibba Oman (with a local fish lunch!)
? January (TBC)

Socotra direct from Sharjah
Wed - Sat, during March (TBC)

Sana'a, Yemen
Easter (2nd last w/e in April)

Jebel Shams Camping
Late April

Masirah Island
May

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Membership renewals:

Please note that if you have not renewed your membership by 31 January 2011, your name will be taken off our list. This means you are not entitled to participate in field trips, will not receive email notification of events and will not receive the *Gazelle*. Details for renewal are given on p.1.



Our Next Speaker

Lamjed El-Kefi has been a very active member of the DNHG for many years, and anyone who has been on his trips will know that his knowledge of natural history here is extensive. He moved in 1980 from his home country Tunisia to the Arabian Peninsula. He is an Engineer by profession, managing a contracting business in Sharjah.

He is also an enthusiastic amateur astronomer who has organised many stargazing trips for the DNHG and likes nothing more than to tour the night sky with his 10" telescope and share his knowledge of the wonders of space.

Amongst other activities, he helped establish "Al Marsa", the 1st diving live-aboard operation in the Musandam area, which has served well in spreading awareness of marine conservation. The DNHG has enjoyed many trips along the spectacular coast of the Musandam on Lamjed's dhow.

Within his various naturalist interests, he has taken photographs all over the Middle East, on land and underwater, and has had many of his photographs credited and published.



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

20,000 Years of History

During our Zanzibar stay, we walked to nearby Kuumbi Cave, said to have been a location for holding slaves before export. The sign to the cave, indicating that the distance was 'about 4 km' was accurate but it seemed much longer than that for those who had thought we were on the way to the beach to visit a seaweed farm!

Kuumbi means 'Great Hall'. It has been the subject of considerable archaeological work in Zanzibar, and human activity there is dated at 20,000 years BC.



Part of Kuumbi Cave

Our guide, who was also the owner of the seaweed plantation we were to visit later that afternoon, said that the cave was rediscovered some time ago by a young local couple who were walking from a remote village towards Jambiani. The woman was not well and had to duck into the bushes. She came upon the cave and so it was rediscovered.

Paul Sinclair, an archaeologist, relates a similar story in his chapter 'The Cave, the Coast, and Ocean Links' in Geoffrey Blundell's *Origins: The Story of the Emergence of*

Humans and Humanity in Africa: Many years ago, two young lovers were looking for a quiet place to be together. They chanced upon an opening in the rock and entered ... Afterwards the young girl threw a stone into the back of the cave. She heard a splash and discovered sweet water. They washed themselves and went home, reporting the cave they had found and the precious water.



Inside the cave

Careful research at Kuumbi has provided evidence of intermittent occupation by hunter-gatherers dating back more than 22,000 years, to a time when Unguja was part of the African continent and supported a fauna typical of a savannah environment. Excavations in Kuumbi cave have also proved significant in pushing back the date of human settlements and trading on the east coast of Africa, as highlighted by Felix Chami, Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Dar Es Salaam, in a conference paper available on the internet (www.cbaac77.com/brazil/brazil_lectures-chami.htm):

The archaeology of Zanzibar, particularly that from the cave of Kuumbi, has uncovered many aspects which also support aspects of ancient historical documents. In a nutshell, it was thought by virtually all scholars before my work, which began in 1990, that the coast of East Africa had no settlements before AD 900. It was further thought

that the beginning of settlements and domestication of plants and animals came after the beginning of Islam, which was also alleged to have begun at AD 900...

[The] caves of Zanzibar do not only demonstrate the existence of Neolithic/ domesticating communities, but also provide a cultural sequence dating back to about 30,000 years ago in the Middle Palaeolithic. The finding of remains of domestic animals and trade goods dating back to before BC/AD changeover to about 4000 BC disproved all thinking that trade and other cultural sophistications had not been in Sub-Saharan Africa before Islam...

Animals which have been found in the Neolithic layers include cattle, goat/sheep, chicken, donkey, dog and cat, all dating back to about 4000 BC. Other cultural aspects found dating back to 10,000 BC or before include human burial of multiple individuals and covered-in stones/cairns and aspects of sailing and trade. Among the goods of contact and trade include chicken (an animal thought to have been domesticated in Asia from about 6000 BC), Indian beads in a BC context and another bead of the Mediterranean type also found in a Neolithic context.

On the walk to and from the cave we observed cassava plantations, created by first building a limestone rock wall to keep out wild pigs and other animals, then burn the vegetation to clear it, then use a crowbar to chip away at the coral to make some pits, then stick some cassava cuttings in the pits and hope for rain (which, from our experience, won't be long coming).



Cassava pits



We also watched an old man laboriously chipping away at the limestone with a small crowbar, and dropping pumpkin seeds in to the holes – this was outside the wall, so maybe pigs don't like pumpkins!

We were rescued at the end of the cave tour by the local truck-taxi, with a low roof and open sides and drove back to Jambiani and thence to see the seaweed farms that the local villagers work, for a pittance paid by a Japanese firm with an agent in the village.



Footnote:

Kuumbi Cave located 3 km from the coast near Jambiani in SE Zanzibar has two large chambers formed from the Miocene limestone. Initial investigations led by Chami and Juma included the excavation of seven test pits. TP 6 reached a depth of > 2.5 m. Excavation results of a 2*2m extension led by Sinclair are presented here. Basal deposits c. 30 cm thick contain a crude coral stone industry with bifacially worked flakes and heavy duty picks and choppers. The osteological assemblage comprises a range of small antelopes, rare giraffe and zebra and abundant *Achatina* snails. Above, a 40cm "sterile?" level (c. 22,000 BP) lacks evidence of human activities but contains bat, baboon and leopard remains. The succeeding 1.5m of mixed ash midden is dated c. 5000 BP, 1800 B.P. and 4000 BP. Marine and terrestrial shells occur but fish is uncommon. Cattle definitely appear from c. 1.5m with suid and chicken-sized bird remains. Some shell and bone are worked. Rare quartz microliths are overlain by limestone flakes. Pottery from the uppermost 1.5 m dates possibly from the first millennium BC to modern times. *Thanks*

to Rob Whelan for his report, information and photographs.

A Tale of Three (Giant) Snails

In her inviting report on Zanzibar in the December *Gazelle*, Sue Hunter mentioned and illustrated a "horribly" large snail observed from the boardwalk among the mangroves there. On reading, I immediately assumed that this would be the large, conical, mangrove mud creeper, *Terebralia palustris* -- a common mangrove-associated intertidal species in the Indian Ocean, whose range extends into the UAE, where it is known from archaeological sites and as a subfossil along the Arabian Gulf and can still be found alive at Khor Kalba. *T. palustris* can reach a length of 12cm.



Terebralia palustris – Large mangrove mud creeper
(The smaller shells are adult *Cerithidea cingulata*)

Instead, Sue's photo was instantly recognizable as another type of snail well known to me – a giant East African land snail (*Achatina* spp.). I thought at first it must be *Achatina fulica*, which it closely resembles, and which is the most widespread species in that group. *A. fulica* is native to East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, etc.) but is found today in most seasonally wet countries and islands of the Eastern Indian Ocean and the West Pacific, and beyond, including Mauritius, Guam, Tahiti, Hawaii and Brazil. In most instances introduction has been facilitated by man, sometimes inadvertently but most often as an edible food source. In these new environments it has proven to be hardy and prolific and in most places it is now considered an invasive and unwelcome species. *A. fulica* adults often reach a length of c.12 cm.



The giant East African land snail *Achatina fulica* -- reviled by some, lamented by others. Pictured here is the late "Blackie", 12.5cm long

However, one element in Sue's account didn't ring true, and it gave me pause: Her snail was evidently found within the mangrove forest. Although I knew that the natural environment of *A. fulica* in East Africa is among leaf litter in forested or vegetated areas, I had never read anything to suggest that it might be found in mangrove areas, which, although notorious for the production of leaf litter, are normally highly saline compared to most 'normal' environments, requiring special physiological adaptations.

That anomaly prompted me to do some further research, from which I learned that Sue's snail is almost certainly not *A. fulica* but a sister species, the Zanzibar endemic *Achatina reticulata*.



Achatina reticulata – Sue Hunter's 'horribly' large snail in Zanzibar mangroves

A. reticulata closely resembles *A. fulica* and frequently grows to even larger size (16cm). *A. fulica* is not found on Zanzibar – providing a good example of how even an "invasive" species is not necessarily invasive within its native region, where it has presumably reached an ecological equilibrium with the other species present – including predators, prey and congeners (i.e., members of the same genus, which are likely to have similar and therefore competing life-styles).



Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan
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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner
res 306 5570
fax 330 3550

Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
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email: valeriechalmers@hotmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers

Seashells and Mammals - 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.



Another interesting and anomalous fact that I learned in the course of this inquiry is that there also exists a species of giant East African land snail that goes by the name of *Achatina zanzibarica*. It was named from a specimen collected in Zanzibar in the 19th century, but it had become extinct there by 1950, and today is found only on the East African mainland, in Kenya and Tanzania. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Mangrove Propagules

"Propagule" is one of those words which, like "ophiolite", can make you sound very knowledgeable, but not when misused in front of someone who knows better. Our editor saw to its correct use in Sue Hunter's report on Zanzibar in the December 2010 *Gazelle*, but asked for more detail.



Propagules (Photograph Sue Hunter)

Rather than fall into error myself, I consulted *The Biology of Mangroves* by Prof. Peter J. Hogarth (Oxford University Press, 1999), who has (among other things) conducted field work in the UAE. He explains as follows:

"All mangroves disperse their offspring by water. A distinctive feature of the majority of mangrove species is that they produce unusually large propagating structures or propagules. This term is used because in most mangrove species what leaves the parent tree is a seedling, not a seed or a fruit. After pollination the growing embryo remains on the parent tree, and is dependent on it, for a period that often stretches to many months. The phenomenon is known as vivipary."

Prof. Hogarth also clarifies another point about mangrove propagation,

mentioned in Sue's report: "The long, pointed appearance of *Rhizophora* [one of the most common mangrove genera] propagules hanging on the parent tree has led to the belief that they plummet like darts into the mud below and so immediately establish themselves. This may sometimes happen, but is probably rare. . . . [T]his mode of distribution would . . . result in virtually all seedlings trying to establish themselves in the shadow of their parent. This is not the most favourable location. . . ."

"The reality is more complex. *Rhizophora* propagules generally float for some time before rooting themselves. Initially, floating is horizontal. Over a period of a month or so they shift to a vertical position. This makes it more likely that the tip will drag in the mud surface and result in the propagule stranding when the tide recedes. Roots first appear after 10 days or so, and many of the propagules lose buoyancy and sink. . . . Most will strand in the horizontal position, and erect themselves after rooting in the mud." *Report by Gary Feulner*

Hatta Nature Hike

An enthusiastic team enjoyed a circuit hike in the mountains near Hatta in early December, following an easy but unspoiled route used by the DNHG on several previous occasions.



This petroglyph was found alone on a terrace and was named years ago by our overseas member Stephen Green as the "Mother Goddess"

Archeology on the gravel terraces included old graves, the foundations of numerous seasonal dwellings and boulder art, all of



which were the subject of thoughtful and sometimes spirited discussion on site. Early December is not (and was not) the best time for flora and fauna, coming as it does after the dry summer and autumn seasons. We saw few birds, although a number of little green bee-eaters, generally rare within the mountains, were patrolling at the start. Fish and toads were likewise few. We saw a number of adult *Cyprinion microphthalmum*, the UAE's largest native fish, but most of them were in a pool (or puddle) so small that we fear for them until the next rains.



Cyprinion microphthalmum

On past excursions, various reptiles have made appearances along this route, but in this instance numbers were low. However, quality substituted to some extent for quantity, and we had excellent views of a large (>60cm) Oman carpet viper, *Echis omanensis*, that had staked out a position in a bedrock narrows. Happily for all concerned, Binish Roobas was leading and was on the lookout for snakes, so there were no unpleasant surprises.



Echis omanensis

The snake was characteristically calm and we got good photos -- but readers should note that this species is reported to be less even-tempered if it is encountered while hunting after dark. (A bite should be treated as potentially life-threatening, and a visit to the hospital for observation and/or antivenin is recommended.)



The Hatta hiking team at their high point

After first hand experience, participants were inclined to agree with the Chairman's views on the importance of perspective in our perception of the Hajar Mountains environment: When you are walking in a wadi, the whole world seems to be wadis. When you ascend to the terraces, you revise your assessment; it seems instead that the whole world is terraces. Then, when you ascend to a peak or a pass for a bird's-eye view, the "truth" becomes evident. Rock and mountains dominate, and the hospitable wadis and terraces, although home to far more life, are a veneer. *Report by Gary Feulner*

Soqatra via Sana'a (Part 1)

En route to Soqatra, our final destination, we stopped over in Sana'a. A late night arrival did not deter us from an early start. David Stanton, who has lived in Yemen for over 20 years and is founder and Executive Director of the Foundation for the Protection of Arabian Leopards in Yemen (FPALY), kindly agreed to meet us over breakfast to share with us both his successes and challenges with FPALY, and his thoughts on Yemen. We then had, as Barbara Hayward put it so succinctly "a wonderfully hectic day walking through the streets of the ancient city, with its narrow streets and beautiful storied houses with white painted decorations around the window frames.



Garden plots in the city

Everywhere we were welcomed with smiles and greetings - a far cry from the anxiety stirred up in the press about the dangers of visiting Yemen. The national museum, with fragments of ancient history that mostly lie unrecorded, the market, with local produce laid out on sacks on the pavement, old women wrapped in sheets of colorful fabric, the chic black being reserved for the younger generations, and shopkeepers busy with a large lump of 'qat' in their cheeks - what a wonderful collection of customs in those old streets. I felt as if I was walking back in time.



The souq

It is a very people-centric city. In the evening, there was a wedding celebration; lights strung across the street and the neighborhood men dancing and singing - a cacophony of sound, but wonderfully lively and spontaneous. Sana'a is a truly ancient place, still full of life as it has been lived for millennia."



The wedding



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The next morning we travelled on to Soqotra. Gary Fuelner wrote "Soqotra island, long isolated, is full of endemic species (i.e., species found only on Soqotra), which is what makes it of such great natural history interest. Many of the plants that we saw, as well as most of the lizards, the two snakes, almost all of the land snails, the most common damselfly, and even a couple of the birds, were endemics, although many were clearly related to Arabian or North African species. (Thanks to Marijcke Jongbloed for supplying an authoritative guide to the fauna.)

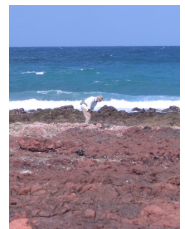
Our observations and reading about the island emphasized two non-intuitive points, however. First, endemic species are not necessarily rare. Forested Soqotra hillsides are dominated by ranks of the "Bottle Tree" *Adenium obesum sokotranum*, arrayed like an army of pot-bellied soldiers. Plateau areas are equally dominated by the huge umbrellas of the "Dragon's Blood Tree" *Dracaena cinnabari*. Both are endemic.



The 'cucumber tree',
dendrosicyos socotranum

Second, endemic species are not necessarily exceptionally fragile. Despite earlier suggestions to the contrary, it now seems to be conceded that the current Soqotra landscape has not changed greatly for hundreds of years, and, in par-

ticular, has made its peace with extensive grazing by domestic live-stock (mostly goats). That is not to say that all is well. Edible plants, like the bottle-trunked fig *Dorstenia gigas*, are admittedly limited to inaccessible cliff sites. In the modern era this could put them at increased risk from climate change, which in Soqotra seems to be following a trend of increasing aridity." (End Part 1.) Thanks to Heidi Struiksma for compiling this report. The report is long, and will be carried on in our next issue of *Gazelle*. Heidi wrote an accompanying note saying, "I would like to mention that I received contributions in photos and/or text from: Marijcke Jongbloed Gary Fuelner Nabeela Dhiban Ulrike Andoff Maureen Steer Barbara Hayward Liz Maley Susan Offerdahl"



Part 2, when we start exploring the island, follows next month.

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

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|---------|---|
| Feb 6 | Lamjed El-Kefi: Backyard Stargazing – An introduction to Amateur Astronomy |
| Mar 6 | Christian Velde: Julfar's History, and Recent Rescue Excavations in Julfar Al Nudud (RAK's old port) |
| April 3 | Rima ... and Ada Natoli: Hawksbill Turtles in Dubai (incl. some genetic analysis) |
| May 1 | Dr Susanne Hofstra: A New Perspective on the Old Fertile Crescent: Archaeology and the Origins of Agriculture |

Field Trips (Members only, please.)

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Jan 28 | Jebel Sumayni Hike |
| Feb 5 | Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve |
| Feb 11 (TBC) | Kayaking in Umm al Qawain |
| Feb 17 - 19 | InterEmirates Weekend in Liwa, hosted by ENHG Abu Dhabi |
| Feb 25-26 | Donkey/Fox Wadi |
| Mar 19 | Marble Quarry at Hijari near Sohar, Oman |

Further field trips, details or changes will be announced or confirmed by e-mail circular.