



# GAZELLE

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مجموعتنا دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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**Contributors—**

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Harry George, Michelle Sinclair, Angela Manthorpe, Tamsin Carlisle, Alexis Biller, Anelisa Lambert, Kirsten Binoth and Barbara Couldrey.

Send in your contributions by 25th March, for the attention of:

[gazelleeditor@gmail.com](mailto:gazelleeditor@gmail.com)



## Hello! Who are you?



Find out what this little mammal is on page 7

## Al Jubail Mangrove Park

On the 15<sup>th</sup> February, a group from the DNHG travelled by coach to the recently opened Al Jubail Mangrove park in Abu Dhabi. The trip was timed to arrive early in the morning coinciding with the change of tidal cycle. Following an introduction by the park manager who explained some key features of mangroves and their importance to the wider marine habitat, the group, adults and children alike were able, by a series of raised interconnected wooden platforms, to navigate the mangrove without fear of wet socks or, for their parents, muddy shoes.

Information signs and exhibits presented visitors with descriptions of the mangrove trees, fish and crustaceans who inhabit these muddy tree-lined forests and highlighted the role they play in maintaining not only the health of the local ecology but also the local economy – a concept known as ‘ecosystem services’.

During the visit it was noticed how dramatically the waters recede. Where juvenile fish had swarmed, swimmer and mud crab roamed, muddy plains were revealed, traversed by meandering tidal channels, decorated with upright aerial mangrove roots (*pneumatophores*) and the many burrows excavated by small crabs hiding from the warm sun.

Those interested to visit independently are encouraged to check the tidal charts at:

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## Announcements and Recordors

**Monthly Speaker -  
Sunday, 1st March, 2020, 7.30pm for 8.00pm**  
(Note that the Annual General Meeting will commence at 8pm, prior to the lecture)

**Lecture Title: "The Southern Ocean: Where land and sea meet"**

**Speaker: Petra Walker**

Petra Walker is a Positive Psychology Practitioner and Executive Coach and has been based in Dubai for the last 6½ years.

Born in a small town in West Wales, she moved to Oxford to study her first degree in Zoology about 35 years ago. It was there that she discovered a passion for scuba diving and met her husband, whom she still dives with.

On leaving University she led an expedition (part funded by the Royal Geographical Society) to Madagascar to study the endangered side-necked turtle, *Erymnochelys madagascariensis*. Although this was a fascinating experience, which broadened the scant knowledge of the species at the time, she decided that field work was not the long-term career she had originally hoped it to be and started her life as an expat in Germany where she taught English.

Her career has spanned a variety of roles, including working in marketing and running her own successful garden design consultancy in the UK. Moving abroad, again, her focus moved to the challenges that expats face and she retrained as a life coach to help others manage uncertainty. That led to studying for a MSc Psychology and now she is completing a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology. However her passion for diving, the natural world and travel has continued. She is Chair of the local Desert Sports Diving Club and, in November she travelled with four other members of the club to South America, where they boarded a ship travelling to the Falklands, South Georgia, South Shetland and Antarctica diving and exploring along the way.

*In the following link, plant expert, Marina Tsaliki explains about the effects of rain falling in Ras al Khaimah.*

*This is a WAM Production via the Emirates News Agency.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nScSmIDHPyo&feature=emb\\_share&fbclid=IwAR2v5ZNRhqlRHC2AZU8otFDDaM1AeE\\_mC\\_Z5cjzwLtG\\_NnhY2f6Ee0SHGsQ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nScSmIDHPyo&feature=emb_share&fbclid=IwAR2v5ZNRhqlRHC2AZU8otFDDaM1AeE_mC_Z5cjzwLtG_NnhY2f6Ee0SHGsQ8)

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### From the Editor:

Ras al Khaimah hosted the annual Inter-Emirates Weekend (IEW) this month, and initial feedback has been very positive. We look forward to hearing your reports for inclusion in the next issue of the Gazelle.

The Dubai Natural History Group's Annual General Meeting will take place just prior to the lecture on 1st March, 2020. See the notice below for details.

Enjoy your read!

### In Memorium

David Neild passed away in Ras al Khaimah earlier this month, aged 81.

The youngest officer to serve in the Royal Oman Scouts, he established the defence forces for Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah in the 1960s. An in-depth feature appeared last year in the Gulf News 'Friday' magazine, outlining his story. [Click here to read more.](#)

David and his wife moved back to Ras al Khaimah in 2013 and focused on his memoirs. This led to the publication of the book below. In the photo, HH Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, received a copy of 'A Soldier In Arabia' from the author David Neild at a private audience at the Palace. Around the same time, he also gave a presentation to the DNHG.

The book was recently translated into Arabic by the National Archives.

Our sincere condolences are expressed here to his widow, Eileen and their family.



### DNHG Annual General Meeting

Please note that the AGM will take place on:

Sunday, 1st March, 2020

8:00pm

At the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management



**Spotlight!**

The intricate and exquisite interior of Jabreen Castle in Oman, by Alexis Biller.  
(Dates gathered from the date plantation [3rd pic], were pressed in this room [4th pic] to extract the honey)



Overnight trip to Salut Archaeological Site, Oman, by Anelisa Lambert



DNHG trip to the Suweidi Pearl Farm, by Michelle Sinclair





## Field Clips, Snippets and Book Reviews

(Continued from page 1)

<https://www.tide-forecast.com/locations/Abu-Dhabi/tides/latest>

and, if visiting during the weekend, to go early in the morning at the opening time before the majority of the visitors arrive.

Contribution by Harry George with photos by M. Swan



This dragonfly was spotted in a Jumeirah garden on 26th February. Possibly a female, it has a distinct blue segment on its upper abdomen (see photo). The blue is in total contrast with the yellow colouration on most of its head and body, and on all *pterostigmata*.

Dragonflies can fly for several miles and it was obviously more tired than startled, as it didn't move at all whilst being photographed. Can readers help to identify it? Contact the [Gazelle editor](#) if you can.

**Participants on the DNHG East Coast Nature Walk, led by Gary Feulner on 21st February, 2020.**

(photo by Kirsten Binoth)



© Kerstin M. Binoth

### Book Recommendations and Reviews

The following two books bear similarities, in that they both discuss the benefits of returning to a natural way of life.

DNHG member, Barbara Couldrey suggests that a good read is "Wilding: The return of Nature to a British Farm" by Isabella Tree.

After decades of intensive agricultural farming, a return to the natural ecosystem is attempted in 2001 by, the owners of a 1400 hectare farm in Sussex.



As the estate gradually rewired itself back to nature, the results were astonishing!

\* \* \* \* \*

Ever wondered how 'Money grows on trees'?

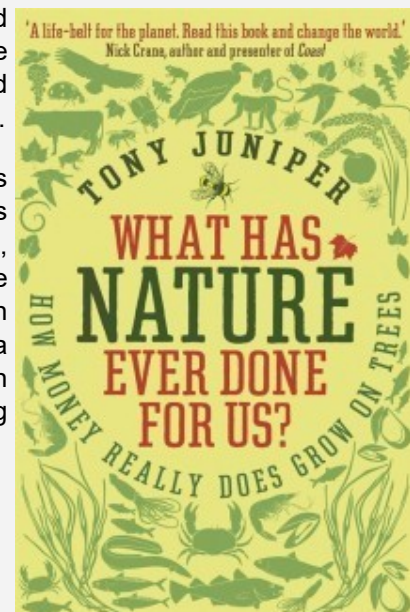
Another book of interest is "What has Nature ever done for us?"

Armed with a strong argument for a 'Natural Health Service', British author and environmentalist, Tony Juniper participated in sessions at the recent Festival of Literature, held at Festival City.

This book contains scientific research which addresses the balance of nature, and describes some of the consequences incurred when this balance is upset.

There are many lectures available online that this author has presented but, for those that missed the session on this book, an outline is presented in a 2012 TED Talk, which can be found at the following link:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=MhPX7p9lypw>





## Field Clips



### A Wedding in Nepal

Last month DNHG members were invited to attend the wedding of the daughter of former DNHG member, Narayan Karki. Narayan is the founder and proprietor of GN English Boarding School and has hosted a number of DNHG field trips to Kathmandu and the Ramechhap area in previous years.

The January issue of the Gazelle featured photos from the lead-up to that wedding, kindly provided by Tamsin Carlisle.

Tamsin continues with her photographs and in-depth observations in the following article.



The bride was occupied at her home with an elaborate Hindu pre-nuptial ritual; meanwhile an assortment of guests drifted in and were duly welcomed as final preparations for the core nuptials continued. This being a Hindu wedding, there were more rituals to be completed.

The next one took place right outside the house of the bride's grandmother, which was also the birthplace of the bride's father, adjacent to the wedding shrine.

Suddenly the pace picked up with the arrival of the groom's retinue, all singing, all dancing.



The grandmother was the wedding's official hostess, and the invitations had been issued in her name. She watched proceedings intently, but it was her daughter-in-law, the bride's mother, who played the central role in this part of the ceremony, carefully pouring life-giving water over the interlaced hands of bride, groom and other key family members offering tokens of fortune and fertility in their palms.

After the joint future of their merged family had thus been formally blessed, bride and groom were linked together by a long, white cloth to receive further blessings.

Finally, just in case anyone was still in the slightest doubt over what this was really all about, a

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## Field Clips

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pretty cow was led in to nurse her calf as the pair were also duly anointed and blessed.

Next through the welcome arch were reinforcements for the village musicians, in the form of a uniformed brass band playing Nepali music tinged with jazz licks, their sound as freshly brilliant as their gleaming instruments.

Then came a double-tiered ceremonial parasol, for the moment shading the bride's father.



A crowd had gathered around the wedding shrine as the marriage ceremony reached its climax.

Some of the symbolism was fairly obvious and had its parallels in western wedding rites. Notably, gifts of valuable jewelry were exchanged between bride and groom, including but not limited to a heavy gold ring for the new husband.

As in some other cultures, confetti and rice were thrown to confer good fortune and fertility on the happy couple. Those two, escorted by the splendid double parasol and its bearer, then processed on their first joint foray to meet wedding guests.

The long ceremonies were wrapped up while the hordes of hungry guests consumed mountains of mutton curry, fried chicken and river fish, washed down with lakes of tea, coffee and soda.

Now the guests were gradually dispersing, some by unconventional transport. A fine, flower-bedecked sedan car had somehow negotiated the rough road to collect the bride and groom. How? Probably very carefully! Finally, all that remained as the moon rose was the clean-up crew.



wedding and three buses had arrived in Makadum to transport guests to a reception and party to be held in the birth-town of the groom - a journey of some 2-3 hours down the winding mountain road and across a wide river. At a riverside hotel, more mountains of food were waiting, and a DJ was on hand to play Bollywood, Nepali and international music hits. The bride's father and mother hosted yet another ceremony at which they bestowed blessings and gifts on each individual member of the groom's large extended family. After dinner, the newlyweds made their first appearance in a 16-day post-nuptial odyssey to be filled with prescribed visits to family and temple during which the bride was required to continue wearing formal red clothing. But there was also time for fun, and they enthusiastically joined in the post-dinner dancing.



Contribution by Tamsin Carlisle



## Field Clips

### The Dunes are Alive

"It takes only a pair of feet, careful eyes and a curious mind, and the beauty of the living desert can be yours". With these words Marijcke Jongbloed ended the first page of her 1987 book 'The Living Desert'. Aiming to fill a couple of hours before a rendezvous in Sharjah in mid-February, I set off for a quick walk in the dunes near the Sharjah Desert Park and discovered how true these words are.

Mist hung in the pre-dawn morning and every surface was heavy with dew. After the winter rains the sand was carpeted with the delicate plant *Eremobium aegyptiacum* (literally 'desert life') pictured on the cover of the book. From afar the plants give the sandy plains a light green sheen, and the petals, white to mauve in colour, were dripping with water. Unless we have more rain this year this spring ephemeral, transitory and short lived, may already have faded by the time you read this article. As I wandered, the steeper faces of the dunes seemed to be the favoured habitat of the Desert Champion, *Silene villosa*. Their magnificent blooms were glistening in the sunrise but come early if you want to see them - the flowers open in the evening and into the night but by mid-morning they've closed-up for the day.

Continuing perambulations up and over the mounds, the sand betrayed the nocturnal movements of beetles, snakes and mammals. We found a camel graveyard and my companion, a former dentist, took some delight in collecting a few dentures for display. Above the hum of the nearby road we heard the sweet call of the desert lark.

Keeping an eye on the time I was about to turn back to the car when an unusual ball below a nearby bush caught my eye. Basking in the sun, its fine fur rippling gently in the breeze, was a jird – reddish brown on top, smart white below. We were transfixed as the little creature preened its black tufted tail, stood on hind legs like a meerkat, clambered into the bush atop its burrow to nip off a few choice shoots and then ventured cautiously a few feet from immediate cover. I took the opportunity to creep closer. The burrow had front and back doors, with the jird diving down one and emerging at the other as if to test my observation skills. Tyre tracks by the front door attested to a near miss. I used another of Marijcke's books 'Wild About Mammals' to identify that this was likely to be a Libyan Jird, *Meriones libycus* – medium sized, active day and night and with a tail that has a well-developed black end tuft. For the sharp eyed, its claws are dark, which helps to distinguish it from those of Sundevall's jird, *Meriones crassus*, which are ivory white.

An increasing body of anecdotal and scientific evidence tells us that time spent in nature and fresh air is good for our well-being and mental health. It's certainly good for mine and we are truly lucky to have the joys of the Living Desert so close. Visit now...it's free!

Contribution by Angela Manthorpe



*Eremobium aegyptiacum*



*Silene villosa*



*Meriones libycus*

## Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme

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

- March 1:** Petra Walker will present an illustrated talk on "The Southern Ocean: Where land and sea meet"
- April 12** Peter de Geest will present an illustrated talk on "Some results of 20 years cave and karst exploration on Socotra island: From biodiversity, over cultural heritage, water management, towards regional regreening projects"

### Scheduled Field Trips (Members only):

- February 28/29** Inter-Emirates Weekend 2020 (RAK Natural History Group)
- March 6:** Umm al Quwain Mangroves
- April 3—7:** Ranthambore National Park (Tiger Safari), India
- May 20—29** Madagascar (with extended version from May 17—29)
- June 5—13:** Crete Island (Greece)
- June 19—26:** Armenia
- July 30—Aug 6** Northern Sumatra

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

## DNHG COMMITTEE 2020

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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## DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership is valid from September 2019 to September 2020. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to Emirates NBD account number 1012012013302. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number: AE640260001012012013302. However, this process does not always identify the payer. So if you wish to pay by cash deposit, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

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*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.