



GAZELLE



مجموعتنا دورتي للتاريخ والطبيعي

Inside this month:	page
Moringa Reserve	1
Announcements and Recorders	2
Spotlight on Ajman	3
Bivalve identification	3
Life after Dubai	4
Traditions live on!	5
Night sky from up high!	5
Online lecture details	6

Contributors—

Thanks to the following for their contributions this month:

Ulrike Andorff, Angela Manthorpe, Gary Feulner, Stephen Green, Margaret Swan and Michelle Sinclair.



Moringa Reserve

On a sunny winter day, we ventured out on a 3-wadis' exploration starting at Wadi Asimah, continuing through Sidr and Sana and finishing near Dibba. Turning off at Al Ghail towards Asimah, we were soon on an enjoyable dirt road passing many farms with lush plantations of date palm, banana & mango trees, vegetable fields, all watered with ancient falaj systems and certainly goat herds. The curvy dirt track was a pleasant drive with several stops to admire the farms, construction of barasti huts, stone houses and splendid nature. While we drove through Asimah, an Emirati gentleman passed with his SUV, stopped and chatted with us three ladies, inviting us to visit his nearby Moringa Reserve. Following his guidance, we soon found the narrow turn off with a steep curved rocky hill path leading out of the wadi, easily manageable with the strong horsepower of Heidi's Nissan Patrol. A large farm with a cottage house awaited us on the wadi plateau at the foot of the rocky hills. The farm did not only have many rows of wonderful scented flowering *Moringa peregrina* trees, but also a large variety of other vegetables and flowers such as zucchini, pepper, aubergine, mushrooms, flowering *Aloe vera*, *Anagallis arvensis*, mashmoom, *Gypsophila bellidifolia*, *Andrachne apera*, *Physorrhynchus chamaerapistrum*, *Caralluma arabica* and so on. We spent a substantial time assessing each plant and, with the help of Minie, who accompanied the plant expert Marijcke for many years, we were able to ID most of them. Several stone walls and houses were situated at the south border of the farm suggesting that this area has been used as farm land for many years. One could feel the heart and soul of the

(Continued on page 4)

Stargazing? (See page 5)



Announcements and Recordors

DNHG Monthly Speaker (virtual)

12th September, 2021 at 8pm (via Zoom)

Presenter: Dr Kay Van Damme

Lecture Title: “Biodiversity richness and conservation challenges in the Socotra Archipelago (Yemen), a UNESCO World Heritage Site”

Biography: Dr. Kay Van Damme is a Belgian freshwater zoologist affiliated with Ghent University (Flanders, Belgium) and Mendel University (Czech Republic), active in biological/biodiversity research and nature conservation in predominantly (sub)tropical areas and with a long experience in the Arabian Peninsula. He has been involved in scientific research and biodiversity conservation in the Socotra Archipelago UNESCO World Heritage Site (Yemen) since 1999, a place which he has visited nearly every year since. He is the Chairperson of the Friends of Socotra Association, in addition to being a member of the IUCN WCPA, and co-coordinator of the ongoing Frankincense Tree (*Boswellia*) conservation and replantation project on Socotra, working closely with local communities in Socotra.



Dr Van Damme is co-author of over 80 academic publications, and he coordinated the scientific aspects of awareness campaigns (connect2socotra, on the importance of biodiversity in Socotra and the challenges, in cooperation with UNESCO), large projects (scientific coordinator of Phase 1 of the UNEP-GEF project in Socotra) and books about the Natural History of Socotra. His scientific background is linked to taxonomy and systematics of freshwater zooplankton (cladocerans, including important model systems) and, in extension, he has investigated freshwater environments in Socotra, discovering and describing a range of new species.

Dr Van Damme's ongoing work is focused on general nature conservation and awareness, freshwater biodiversity, and on replantation and research of the endangered endemic trees in Socotra that are crucial to local communities. His work is on the crossroads between cutting-edge science, international collaborations and biodiversity conservation, in order to bridge basic science and protection of nature closer together.

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kay-Van-Damme/research>

This talk will focus on aspects of the rich biodiversity of the Socotra Archipelago, its uniqueness, as well as major challenges to the highly vulnerable insular ecosystems.

In a time of climate change and a gradual disconnection between man and nature, what will the future bring? The talk is based on 22 years of experience of research and conservation efforts in Socotra (in collaboration). Attendees of the presentation will see a glimpse of potential extinction risks of key endanger and species, and feel hope when seeing good practice examples of modest, yet effective, conservation interventions with high potential of countering some of these global challenges at a local scale in Socotra.

Readers may be interested in the three-day annual 'Friends of Socotra' Annual General Meeting, which will take place at the Ghent University in Belgium between 24th-26th September. The Dragon Tree Conference will transmit on 27th September and a Zoom link will be shared with registered participants. Details of how to register can be found at the following link: <https://www.dnhg.org/lectures.html>



The photo on the left shows the unique Dragon Blood Trees *Dracaena cinnabari* and the photo on the right is of the only endemic dragonfly in Socotra, the Bluet or *Azuragrion granti*



DNHG Recordors

Reptiles - Dr. Reza Khan
050 6563601

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi
res: 06-5310467 off: 06-5583 003
lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi (contact as above)

Geology - Gary Feulner
res: 04 306 5570
grfeulner@gmail.com

Insects - Binish Roa bas
050 243 8737
johanruphus@hotmail.com

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers
res: 04 4572167
mobile: 050 8305018 email:
valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants - Valerie Chalmers
(contact as above)

Archaeology - Anelisa Lambert
056 6904508
anelisalambert@gmail.com

Seashells - Andrew Childs
050 4590112
andrew.childs@eim.ae

Bird Recorder— Panos Azmanis
050 7083555
azmanis.vet@gmail.com

Mammals—Jacky Judas
04 354 9776
050 6181026
jjudas@enwwf.ae

From the Editor:

Schools are back after the summer break—a sign that the new season has started. Welcome to our new members and welcome back to those returning.

Until we can resume normal activities, the DNHG lectures will continue to transmit virtually via Zoom, starting on 12th September (details above).

Individual members have been venturing out so we have a few stories to tell.

Enjoy your read!

Spotlight!

Ajman Mangroves, by Margaret Swan

The smallest of the United Arab Emirates, Ajman boasts an interesting natural coastline. According to Wikipedia, 'An 1822 British maritime survey noted that Ajman had one of the best backwaters on the coast and was a small town with a single fortified building, the ruler's house.' <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajman>

We visited Ajman during late August. Still too warm you might think but the combination of wind and the cooler time of day set the scene for a very pleasant abra ride. The Ajman mangroves stretch for quite a distance and many cormorants were spotted either in the water, flying overhead or just gathering in groups on the small, secret beaches that dotted the coastline.

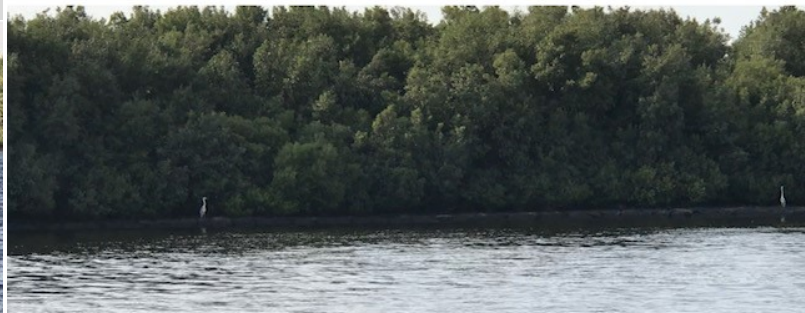
Also in abundance were a variety of heron species and egrets, most of them on the water's edge, motionless and keen-eyed, waiting patiently for dinner to swim by.

Having heard of regular fox sightings in Ras al Khaimah, I wondered if that was what I saw on a distant beach, as the animal was about the same size and coloration. One of a pair, its movements were similar to that of a fox or small dog and I could clearly see that it had a bushy tail. As this was an impromptu boat ride I only captured an image with the camera phone (see photo below). Next time I will be more prepared!

Contribution by Margaret Swan



Juvenile cormorants waiting for mama's return with a fish supper!



Hidden (and not so hidden) Bivalves

Thanks to Angela Manthorpe for identifying this bivalve from an article in the June Gazelle on page 6.

"The bivalve you show in the photo is a small scallop. On some sites, particularly Red Island in the Musandam, the scallops grow quite large - sometimes larger than my palm! In local waters they anchor themselves in place - that could be on rocks, or on a shipwreck - and they particularly like overhangs which protect them as they filter feed. In the UK I remember doing a spectacular dive off Lulworth Cove in Dorset. As we drifted over the sandy sea bed, the scallops launched themselves off the bottom and, clapping the 2 sides of the shell together, they would 'fly' away from us."



Field Clips



(top) Moringa Reserve
(left) *Moringa peregriana* in flower (right) *Caralluma arabica*

(Continued from page 1)

owner in the upkeep of the farm. From the plateau you had a beautiful overview over the wadi with its side arms and adjacent plantations. While this was definitely one of the main highlights of the tour, the continuous drive through Sidr and Sana shall not be missed. The landscapes with the meandering wadi beds bordered by high sediment walls, the rugged Hajar Mountains and the green farms are indeed mesmerizing. In Wadi Sidr we spotted many beehives located on the hill slopes in rock made caves. During our photo stop, we bumped into a convoy of like-minded DNHG folks who equally enjoyed the wadi sceneries – small is the world even in nature. Once you

reach Wadi Sana, the dirt road takes you to the top of 2 Hajar mountain peaks with amazing views over the mountain range and the Dibba coast line. There are 2 possibilities to descend towards Dibba - our advice: take the western dirt road as the eastern track is extremely washed away after around 800m, forcing you to turn around in an extremely dangerous and narrow curve. Another amazing day out and around in the beautiful Hajar Mountains with plenty of new experiences!

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

Life After Dubai: Famous Fossiling

Two veteran UAE naturalists, now retired in England, met up in late July for a day of fossil hunting on the south coast in the greater Southampton area. Stephen Green is a former DNHG member and has published on Bahrain seashells and UAE land and freshwater snails. Dick Hornby was the first scientific director of the UAE's National Avian Research Centre and later chairman of the ENHG Abu Dhabi. Their example is reassuring: curiosity never dies, notwithstanding certain impediments of age (including the current "age of Covid"). But their experience also demonstrates that in the field, the normal rules still apply: Know the local terrain and its peculiarities, and be prepared for anything.

Having previously explored the Late Eocene Bartonian beds to the west, they chose the Tadiford Gap, where Early Eocene strata called the Headon beds are exposed. As Stephen describes the seaside cliffs there:

"They include famous fossil leaf beds and some of the strata are fresh water. In the early 19th century Sir Charles Lyell and Sir Richard Owen did a number of papers on this area. New crocodile and turtle species all over the place apparently, although I have no idea exactly where, or what the fallen matrix would look like. The first ever toothed prehistoric whale found in the UK was dug out here, something like *Zeuglodon basilosaurus* (?) or similar. The area had its own equivalent of Mary Anning, a lady called the Marchioness of Hastings, who on taking residence at nearby Milford On Sea turned her attention to fossil collecting. On her death she bequeathed her entire fossil collection to the British Museum, who said it was probably one of the best collections in the world."

So an easy day in a historic setting was planned, but unfortunately the outing proved ill-starred. Says Stephen: "It was a bit of a disaster! Having had a dry month of sun and +30 degree temperatures, soon after our arrival on the beach it dropped to around 12°C and poured down like a monsoon. I only had on a thin short sleeve shirt with shorts and quite soon had to turn back. Then our troubles began! The steep but attractive cliff face consisting primarily of clay and shales had turned into the equivalent of a sheet of ice covered in washing up liquid*, almost impossible to climb (with the tide coming in!!). I fell backwards heels over head but thankfully landed on my big fat bum and head, both of which seem to be the best things for me to fall on. Eventually we followed a stream bed up the side gully where the rushing water had exposed gravels and plants, which provided just enough purchase to extract our wet, muddy, cold selves (I will never again complain about mangroves!!)."

[*Note: Certain shales, especially the kind that weather to "badlands", expand when wet, becoming slick and greasy and treacherous to walk or drive on. The same is true, in the UAE, of the powdery surfaces of graded vehicle tracks in the Musandam region, and of the whitish, gypsum-surfaced (gatch) tracks that crossed many of the interior desert regions of Abu Dhabi in the 1990s, before giving way to tarmac.]

There is no record that either Sir Charles Lyell or Sir Richard Owen experienced any similar mishaps in the area, but those may have been omitted from their scientific accounts. Being swept away down tropical rivers is adventurous and can be re-told for fame and profit. Floundering in English mud is not only less heroic but vaguely ridiculous.

For other would-be fossil hunters, Stephen offers the following few general tips: "(1) It generally takes some time on site to figure things out and get your eye in. (2) Unfortunately, the ability to sell things on ebay stops most people telling me the good spots. Also many obsessive collectors tend to send you miles away in the wrong location."

Contribution by Gary Feulner, with thanks to Stephen Green



The Headon Beds near Tadiford Gap
(taken by Stephen Green)

Field Clips

Traditions live on

In a recent ENHG talk Alexandra v. H. mentioned a private museum in Dibba, unknown to me, and therefore it was added on my “summer” list of things to do. The appointment was arranged easily with the owner in person, and already the next day we were set to explore the unexpected. Mr. Ali Salem Al Dhanhani, the owner and master behind the exhibition, was already expecting us. Rapidly we were ushered into the exhibition hall which houses a large collection of traditional items including, but not limited to, rifles, knives, kids’ toys, pottery as well as farming, household and medical tools and artifacts. Furthermore, 3 different styles of typical coastal houses as well as a large Bedouin tent are erected with the typical interior and display of necessities. Mr. Ali Salem took an ample amount of time in vividly explaining and showcasing the use of the traditional objects, never mind his age, and had especially joy in demonstrating the antique fun toys he played with as a youngster. After the intensive tour, Arabic coffee and dates from his farm were served in the majlis. During our chitchat we learnt that he is called the “King of the Bees” in the Dibba region owing to his extensive beehive cultures on his farms which made him famous even across borders. With pleasure he guided us to the bee shop which contains huge pots of own produce of Samar and Sidr honey, both on offer with or without the honeycomb. The temptation could not be resisted. Mr. Ali Salem was so enticed by our enthusiasm that we were honoured with an extended tour of his two farms, both idyllic retreats with plenty of fruit and palm trees, herb bushes for medical use inclusive and an area with a large goat herd, a camel and a cow. The slopes of his mountain farm are dotted with numerous beehive caves, natural ones as well as manmade from the mountain rocks, which will be occupied by the bees during the two seasons. Mr. Ali Salem has put tremendous efforts in his truly amazing collection of the past which underlines his pride of his heritage. The visit was yet another wonderful experience not to miss.

Contribution by Ulrike Andorff

(photos clockwise) Mr. Ali Salem Al Dhanhani holding a honeycomb, slippers made from car tyres, medical utensils



Night Sky from up high!

Following a lecture on 2nd August by the CEO of Dubai Astronomy Group, Hasan Ahmed Al Hariri, it was from the 52nd floor of ‘The View’ observation deck on Palm Island that three DNHG members witnessed Saturn in Opposition through powerful telescopes.

The photo on the left shows two visible moons whereas in the photo on the right, Saturn’s rings are clearly seen.

The Dubai Astronomy Group has grown in size and stature since its humble beginnings in 2000. Read more about them and the unique Middle Eastern night sky [here](#).



Photographs by Michelle Sinclair (cover photo was taken looking down from the viewing deck of the 52nd floor of ‘The View’)

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2021

Monthly lectures are presently transmitted via Zoom, starting at 8.00pm

12 September: Dr Kay Van Damme

“Biodiversity richness and conservation challenges in the Socotra Archipelago (Yemen), a UNESCO World Heritage Site”

The DNHG field trip program has been temporarily suspended in compliance with UAE coronavirus precautions, which are still in force.

DNHG Website Co-ordinator

DNHG wishes to thank Sandhya Prakash for her service over the past decade and, in particular, for her assistance in launching our website and facebook page. We wish her well upon her family's upcoming return to India (after more than twenty six years in the UAE).

We warmly welcome Alexis Biller, who is an IT professional and an active DNHG member as the new Website Co-ordinator.

DNHG COMMITTEE 2020/2021

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

	Name	telephone	email
Chairman	Gary Feulner	04 306 5570	grfeulner@gmail.com
Vice Chairman	Valerie Chalmers	050 830 5018	valeriechalmers@gmail.com
Treasurer	Puneet Kumar	050 452 4820	puneetcps@gmail.com
Membership Secretary	Alessandra Pipan	052 7771183	lssndr.ppn@gmail.com
Speaker Co-ordinator	Michelle Sinclair	050 458 6079	sinclairmichelle611@gmail.com
Fieldtrip Co-ordinator	Sonja Lavrenčič	050 256 1496	lavson@gmail.com
Member-at-Large	Pradeep Radhakrishna	050 450 8496	wgarnet@eim.ae
Member-at-Large	Anindita Radhakrishna	050 656 9165	anin@eim.ae
Newsletter Editor	Margaret Swan	050 798 4108	gazelleeditor@gmail.com
Librarian/Book Sales	Angela Manthorpe	058 135 4143	manthorpe2005@yahoo.co.uk
Postmaster	Sandi Ellis	050 644 2682	sandiellis@gmail.com
Chief Engineer	Binish Roobas	050 243 8737	johanruphus@hotmail.com
Website Co-ordinator	Alexis Biller	055 103 9014	alexis.biller@gmail.com

Postal Address: DNHG, PO Box 9234, Dubai, UAE

DNHG Membership

DNHG membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership for the current year is valid from September 2020 to September 2021. In consideration of the restrictions on our lectures and field trips due to COVID-19, **all members who were paid up (or considered paid up) for 2020—2021 will be automatically renewed for 2021-2022**, without a renewal fee.

New members can join by (i) sending to the Membership Secretary (see above) a completed one-page membership form, which can be downloaded from our website (www.dnhg.org) and (ii) making payment to our Emirates NBD account by cash deposit or transfer from your 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.