



GAZELLE

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مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي



Kalba White Collared Kingfisher, Khor Kalba *Photo Credit Sonya Benjamin*

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Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:

Gary Feulner, Valerie Chalmers, Tamsin Carlisle, Jackie Strick

Georgia



Orthodox Church in Georgia Photo Credit Sonya Benjamin

Date: Apr 18-23

Contact: Paulomi Bhatt paulomi@theworldatherfeet.com

DNHG member, Sue Sharyn Ward, is one of the organizers of a trip to Georgia from 18th to 23rd April 2013. There are still spaces on this trip and she says if any of the DNHG members are interested in joining the trip they can contact or register their interest on the facebook page.

www.theworldatherfeet.com

www.facebook.com/theworldatherfeet

The trip includes visits to Tbilisi, Mtskheta, Uplistsikhe, and Kakheti. The trip cost is 600 AED per person, and includes all expenses inside Georgia (meals, entrance fees, rooming).

The editor visited Georgia last summer and highly recommends testing the traditional unfiltered Georgian wine which is fermented in clay jars in the earth. The taste of the wine is very unique, and it is the only place in the world that still utilizes this method today!

Sharjah Archaeology Museum

Date: March 30 2013

Availability: Limited to 30 people

The Architectural Heritage Society- English Chapter is pleased to announce its trip to the Sharjah Archaeology Museum on Saturday from 9:30 A.M until 11:30 A.M .This trip includes a tour around the museum in addition to a pottery Restoration workshop.

The museum tour will include a historical journey through different time periods that are represented in distinctive pottery from each time period. The tour is followed by a restoration workshop of pottery including discussion on excavation process, general understanding on pottery types in different ages, restoration techniques...etc.

To register your attendance, please contact Shatha Al Mulla on s.almulla@hotmail.com or 050-9255900.

Our Next Speaker

Date: Sun 14 April 2013

Speaker: Dr. Rolf Schuster

Topic: Parasite Fauna in Desert Environments

Dr. Schuster graduated from Moscow Veterinary Academy, spent his whole professional life with parasites, received his PhD from Humboldt-University in Berlin and has worked as a parasitologist in the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory in Dubai since 2002.

On the topic: The parasite fauna in desert environments differ from that in other parts of the world. In detail we have examined the parasites of cats here in Dubai and surrounding territories. Parasites with indirect life cycles that include intermediate or paratenic hosts have advantages compared to those with a direct development. Freshwater is rare in the desert and under certain circumstances can easily become a source of infection. Muddy banks are the breeding grounds of horse flies the mechanical vector for trypanosomes of camels. Contrary to temperate climates houseflies in Arabia occur during the winter months and play a role as intermediate hosts for stomach worms in horses. Closely related worms can be found in the stomach of camels. These worms utilize scarab beetles as intermediate hosts. Desert dwelling darkling beetles are the intermediate hosts for a recently described nematode that inhabits the stomach of falcons. Larval stages of this nematode are not host specific and can invade a variety of paratenic hosts (reptiles, birds and most probably also small rodents) on which falcons hunt for. Camel ticks and nasopharyngeal bots are the most successful species among parasitic arthropods in the desert.



Shown above: the distal leg of a horse with a 'summer' sore. The wound above the hove is not healing because houseflies infected with nematode larvae are attracted. Photo Credit Dr. Rolf Schuster

This year's Inter-Emirates Weekend was hosted by ENHG Al Ain at the Danat Resort Hotel in Al Ain. Members who attended it reported a wonderful weekend with a varied and interesting programme of trips and an excellent lecture on Mosque Architecture given by Dr Susanne Hofstra, which was followed up with two Al Ain Mosque Architecture Tours. Our thanks to ENHG Al Ain.

At the IEW Dinner on the Friday evening (12th), the ENHG's two Annual Natural History Awards were announced. The Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for Natural History was given to Oscar Campbell, current Chair of the Emirates Bird Record Committee and the Bish Brown Award was given to Rima Jabado, PhD candidate, for her research on the status of little-studied populations of sharks and other elasmobranchs in the waters of the UAE and Oman. This was followed by a tribute from Dr Brigitte Howarth, Chairman of ENHG Al Ain, to the late JNB ('Bish') Brown, who together with the then-current British Ambassador, Anthony Harris and ADMA colleague, Rob Western, together established the Emirates Natural History Group in 1977. Individual reports on field trips from the IEW 2013 follow.

Al-Jazira Oasis



Jazira gorge and adjacent plantations. Photo Credit Gary Feulner

Al-Jazira Oasis is the most remote of the mountain oases in the Mahdhah area of Oman that are accessible by car. It is approached from a ridge to the south which gives dramatic views of the plantations (mostly date palms) and the large dammed lake (sometimes washed out after heavy rains). It was here that Jodie Healy of the Al-Ain ENHG chose a superb route for an introduction and survey of the mountain flora, descending a modest gully from the vehicle pass.

We encountered such abundance and diversity (some 60 species in only about 200 meters) that we were ultimately unable to complete the transit of the wadi before the appointed hour to depart. Yet a quick perusal of the lower slopes and the gorge area made it clear that there were many more species that could have been recorded.

One highlight of Al-Jazira is the tall sedge *Cladium mariscus* that grows adjacent to the lake. This species is otherwise known in our area from only a single additional site, in Wadi Wurayah on the East Coast of the UAE, where it was first recorded by DNHG Vice Chairman Valerie Chalmers on an IEW field trip in 2009. Report by Gary Feulner

IEW Field Trip Reports

IEW Bird-Watching

InterEmirates Weekend bird-watching at Green Mubazzarah and Zakher Pools, 7 a.m. – noon, February 22, led by Diane Evans, Huw Roberts and Leslie Butler

Staying at the One-to-One Al-Fayda Hotel instead of the full-up Danat Resort had its advantages: I was able to walk to Green Mubazzarah and was early enough to catch the rising sun sending out spectacular rays from behind mist-clad Jebel Hafit and the earliest doves, bulbuls and quail stirring in nearby plantations.

Still pre-trip, in the manicured parkland just outside Green Mubazzarah proper, I was greeted by Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), Chukar Partidge (*Alectoris chukar*) and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) – all old-hat to the locals, as the ibis and chukar are introduced species and the Cattle Egrets are common winter visitors to cultivated/landscaped habitats, but I enjoyed the close encounters. The chukar, which is the national bird of Pakistan, was introduced to southern Arabia in the 17th century. The Sacred Ibises have been breeding independently in and around Al Ain for nearly two decades, after 70 individuals were introduced in 1993.

My next sighting, still in the landscaped area, was a Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) hanging out with the ibises and egrets. That was soon followed in the Green Mubazzarah camp ground by the discovery of an active pale crag martin nest on the exterior wall of the Oasis coffee shop. The parents flitted in and out, keeping an eye on things but too nervous to land. This was where I met up with the rest of the IEW birding group.

From the coffee shop, we walked to rocky, hill-flanked ground at the mouth of Wadi Nahyan, on our way observing the two locally abundant bulbul species - Red-vented (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and White-eared (*Pycnonotus leucotis*) - as well as Collared Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*). We also saw a Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) perched atop the decorative rooftop concrete of a park building and a few of the local mountain subspecies of Desert Lark (*Ammomanes deserti taimuri*) in the adjacent parking lot.

The un-landscaped wadi entrance lived up to its local reputation as an easily accessible place to encounter typical avian inhabitants of the Hajar Mountains. In addition to more Blue Rock Thrushes and Desert Larks, we saw Rufous-tailed Thrushes (*Monticola saxatilis*), the small but striking Black-and-White Hume's Wheatear (*Oenanthe albonigra*) a Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) – wild antecedents of the ubiquitous urban pigeon. Purple Sunbirds (*Cynnirris asiaticus brevirostris*) were heard and spotted in a profusely flowering mesquite tree, which is among these nectar-feeding birds' favourite seasonal food sources.

For me, the morning's standout observation was a Desert Lark energetically bashing a sunflower seed on an anvil stone in an effort to crack it open. I have posted a short video clip with public accessibility on my Facebook page here: <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10151797514069951>.

A final treat was in store for us as we returned to the cars: an Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) performing its dramatic aerial courtship display, looping the loop and indulging in the diving rolls from which it derives its colloquial English name. A pair of chukar also put in an appearance (*cont. on pg 5*).



From top to bottom: Blue Rock Thrush, Blue Rock Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Desert Lark, Grey Heron Photo Credits Tamsin

IEW Bird-Watching cont.

From Green Mubazarrah, our large convoy proceeded to the nearby Zakher Pools, an artificial wetland at a water-treatment site that has become one of the bird-watching hot spots of the inland UAE. There we saw a number of typical wetland species including Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Coot (*Fulica atra*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*), Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*), Red-wattled Lapwing, Stint (*Calidris sp.*), some smallish gulls in winter plumage (probably *Croicocephalus ridibundus*), a Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) and several wild duck species: Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), the similar but smaller Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), teal (*Anas crecca*) and northern shoveler (*Anas clypeata*). We also saw a group of five Egyptian Geese (*Alopochen aegytiacus*), which arrived a few weeks ago and are infrequent visitors to this location.

Among the smaller birds I spotted were a Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) and a Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus sp.*).

Shortly after 11 a.m., with the wind picking up and already two hours after the trip was scheduled to end, we decided to call it a day. Many thanks to our Al Ain hosts for sharing these wonderful birding locations!

Postscript: The following morning, while travelling as a passenger in a convoy headed through Green Mubazarrah for the IEW Wadi Nahyan walk, I saw a Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) on the grass. Initially I thought this must be another introduced species, on a par with the Sacred Ibis, but there have been other documented late February sightings of wild cranes near Al Ain at the Al Qa'aa fodder feed. It is therefore possible that the bird I saw was a wild migrant.

For additional photos of IEW bird sightings (but unfortunately not the crane), please visit the publicly accesible album on my Facebook site at the following URL:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151758538244951.1073741826.681524950&type=3>

Report by Tamsin Carlisle



From top to bottom: Water Pipit, Desert Lark, Egyptian Goose, Egyptian Geese. Photo Credits Tamsin Carlisle



IEW Field Trip Reports

IEW Wadi Nahyan Canyon Walk



From top right corner, clockwise: *Rumex limoniastrum*, Wadi Nahyan, Pitted Beetle Photo Credits Tamsin Carlisle

IEW Wadi Nahyan canyon walk, February 23, 2013, led by Leslie Butler assisted by Brigitte Howarth

Ensnconced as I was in lodgings near Green Mubazzarah, the Wadi Nahyan canyon walk offered a welcome chance to explore the natural environment beyond the landscaping of the popular park. Indeed, the walk started exactly where the previous day's birdwatching trip had left off. The focus, however, wasn't birds, even though several Indian silverbills presented themselves on a profusely flowering mesquite tree near the wadi entrance. Rather, it was on the locality's spectacular geomorphology and many plants in flower in the wake of spring rains. The first indigenous plant to catch my attention was *Aerva javanica*, a member of the amaranth family with cottony flower heads that were traditionally used to stuff mattresses, cushions and camel saddles. Other notable herbs included the pretty lilac-flowered crucifer *Physorrhycus chamaerapistrum*, which in other locations is usually grazed to ground level by feral goats – but no evidence of such goats in Wadi Nahyan.

Further up the wadi, we encountered *Heliotropium lasiocarpum*, a member of the borage/forget-me-not family with sharply defined double rows of tiny white flowers. This uncommon species occurs only in a few scattered locations in the UAE, of which Wadi Nahyan is evidently one. Plant cover thinned out as we climbed the steep head-wall at the far end of the wadi, but the notable species we saw at higher elevation included the shrub *Rumex limoniastrum*. The buckwheat/knotweed family member is not commonly encountered, but that may be simply because it typically grows on cliffs and steep rocky slopes at moderate to high elevations in the forbidding Hajar Mountains.

As for fauna, in addition to the silver bills we spotted rock doves, at least one jumpy lizard – provisionally identified as a juvenile banded ground gecko - and a few arthropods including a pitted darkling beetle, an assassin bug and an unidentified black spider. Such modest biosphere pickings paled in the face of spectacular geology-in-the-raw, framing impressive panoramic views from higher elevations looking back towards Green Mubazzarah. In Wadi Nahyan, it is possible to observe on the surface the effects of the upheaval in the earth's crust caused by the subduction of the Nubian beneath the Arabian shield that created the Hajar Mountains. Exposed here are uplifted layers of petrified sediment, formed beneath the floor of the ancient Tethys Sea, crisscrossed by faults that acted as conduits for magma upwellings from beneath the earth's crust. Many of the faults became heavily mineralized, now visible as exposed calcite veins. Extensive surface weathering by water and wind have contributed to complex geomorphology that in places resembles the ruins of man-made stone walls. This is a location to which petroleum geologists flock as they attempt to understand and model underground events that elsewhere in the region created traps for oil and natural gas. Otherwise it has been largely undisturbed by man or invasive feral species, creating a refuge for indigenous flora and fauna.

Additional photos from the canyon walk are publicly accessible on my Facebook page at the following URL: <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151776515679951.1073741830.681524950&type=3>

Report by Tamsin Carlisle

Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan

res: 344 8283
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Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi

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Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner

res: 306 5570

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers

res: 394 8871
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Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology, Seashells, Birds 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.

Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*. Full training will be given. Contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!

The UAE adds a third Ramsar Site

The UAE has just added a third Ramsar site located in Sharjah.

Under the management of the Environment and Protected Areas Authority of Sharjah, Khor Kalba, an important coastal area containing mangroves and mud flats, has been declared a Ramsar site. Internationally recognized, Ramsar status aids in recognition of important biodiversity hot spots, particularly wetland ecosystems which support a variety of migrant and breeding bird species. Although only one criteria needs to be recognized, Khor Kalba meets three criteria: old growth mangrove stands exist in the khor which are under threat in the region; the khor supports threatened species; and more than 1% of the global population of the vulnerable Socotra Cormorant has been recorded in the area. Additionally, the endemic Kalba White Collared Kingfisher resides and breeds only in Khor Kalba within the entirety of the UAE. For more information on Khor Kalba as a Ramsar site, visit:

<<http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/environment/khor-kalba-becomes-3rd-uae-site-hailed-as-globally-significant-wetland>>

<http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-news-archives-2013-uae-kalba/main/ramsar/1-26-45-590%5E26113_4000_0__>

For more information on Ramsar sites, visit:

<http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-news-bulletin-board-2013/main/ramsar/1-26%5E24646_4000_0__>

Earth Hour in the UAE

The UAE once again partook in the international awareness event Earth Hour, organized by the World Wildlife Fund. This year Earth Hour occurred on March 23 from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM. Residents were encouraged to turn off lights and other electronic devices during the hour to promote awareness as well as contribute to reducing the carbon footprint— even for just one hour.

Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) announced that Earth Hour 2013 achieved savings of 200,000 kW/h, and **120 tons of carbon emissions**.

A number of FM companies, construction companies and developers also participated in Earth Hour 2013, including Khidmah, Energy Advantage, Emaar, Enpark and Tecom, Dubai, and more.

More than 7,000 cities and towns in 152 countries and territories took part in Earth Hour last year. The campaign broke records to become the largest voluntary action for the environment, and seems to continue to grow with each passing year.

Major landmarks around the world have taken part in Earth Hour, including the Sydney Opera House, the Great Pyramids, the Empire State Building and the Las Vegas Strip. Even the so-called City of Lights has gone dark, with the Eiffel Tower shutting off its power.

Sources:

<<http://www.constructionweekonline.com/article-21553-dubai-earth-hour-saves-120-tons-carbon-emissions/#.UVCTLBymjZU>>

<<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2013/03/22/earth-hour-facts.html>>

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

April 14 **Dr. Rolf Schuster: Parasite Fauna in Desert Environments**

Field Trips (Members only, please)

March 30	Sharjah Archaeology Museum with the Architectural Heritage Society
Mar 28 - Apr 3	Tadoba Tiger Sanctuary
Mar 29-Apr 6	Nepal Hill Country
Apr 11-13	Saiq Plateau & the Roses
Apr 18-23	Georgia

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

DNHG COMMITTEE 2013

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Contributions

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to: gazelleeditor@gmail.com
(Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2012 to Sep 2013. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to **HSBC** account no. 030100242001. (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 AE900200000030100242001. However, this process does not identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also scan and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation 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.