

# GAZELLE

Vol 16 no 4 - April 2001



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

**DUBAI NATURAL HISTORY GROUP**

PO Box 9234, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Members' News

### *A quiet month*

Dr Marijke Jongbloed, Dr Reza Khan and Gary Feulner all addressed a student seminar on Wildlife Protection and Conservation held at Our Own English High School in Sharjah in connection with the Second Annual Inter-School Story Writing Competition, sponsored by Gulf Today.

### *Natural History Items wanted for a small exhibition*

Dr Marijke Jongbloed may be creating a small natural history exhibition in the near future. It is for an adventure camp on the East Coast for children and young adults. She has fossils, some shells and rocks but could use any other items. If you have any stuff lying around that could be put to good use, please contact Marijke on 050-6262411 or Tel/Fax 3497963

### **What's in a Name? Ru'us al-Jibal**

To the people of the mountains of the Musandam peninsula, that area has traditionally been known as the Ru'us al-Jibal. Ru'us is the plural of ra's (meaning 'head,' or by extension, 'top,' or even, in parallel with English, 'cape' or

'promontory'). Jibal (with the accent on the long second syllable) is the plural of jabal (two short syllables), meaning 'mountain' or 'peak'. Thus Ru'us al-Jibal translates literally as "the Heads of the Mountains" and more loosely as "the Mountaintops" or "the High Peaks." The name may still have a certain emotional significance. One elderly mountain resident smiled and broke into soft, wistful song, with Ru'us al-Jibal as the lyrics, when he heard a foreigner use the term in the mountains.

Some geographical purists prefer to reserve the term 'Musandam peninsula' for the final isthmus and digitate peninsula that stretches from Khasab to Kumzar. This constrains them to use another term for the mountainous peninsula as a whole, and Ru'us al-Jibal is useful for this purpose. Ru'us al-Jibal also arguably avoids any potential political confusion, since the mountainous area includes territory belonging both to the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman, the latter constituting the Musandam Province (Wilayat Musandam) of Oman. The name Musandam is taken from the largest island just off the easternmost tip of the peninsula.

*Report by Gary Feulner*

### **DNHG Membership and Renewal**

DNHG membership remains a bargain at Dhs 50 (singles or couples).

You may join or renew at meetings or send a cheque to Fi Skennerton, DNHG Membership Secretary, PO Box 29561, made out to Lloyds Bank account no 173746. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG.) Membership is valid from September 2000 to September 2001.

Membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, 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:**

Valeria Chalmers  
Barbara Cou drey  
Peter Cunningham  
Gary Feulner  
Mike Lorrigan



### Birdwatching at Al Wathba Thurs 26 April

David Snelling will be at the Camel Track, Abu Dhabi at 9am. Those interested should contact David by e-mail. Any-one who will be arriving later in the day should contact David to arrange an alternative time and meeting place. e-mail David on: david.snelling@emirates.com

**The trip to Sir Bani Yas Island has been cancelled due to the risk of foot and mouth disease.**

### Wildlife Centre Friday 11 or 18 May

We are planning a visit to the Wildlife Centre near Sharjah, though the date is uncertain at the time of going to print. For further details please contact Fi Skenarfon. Tel: 050-624 3028 or speak to her at the next meeting.

### Saiq Plateau 24/25 May

A visit to the Saiq plateau led by Peter van Amsterdam. Maximum 10 couples. Accommodation can be arranged at the Saiq Plateau Hotel.

Please contact Peter van Amsterdam on 050 6425077 to register your interest and for further details

### Field trip to Wadi Daftah

26 members of DNHC visited Wadi Dallah on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. Wadi Daftah is near Masafi and is a very varied wadi with plantations, a ruined watch tower, a lemon/orange grove, a well-established falaj system, deep pools, a well and some lovely scenery. We set out in the direction of the watch tower, (several members climbed to the top of the tower) and then proceeded via the

lemon/orange grove to the upper reaches of the wadi. We spent time examining the flora and fauna and observing life in the wadi pools. Members of the group recorded what they found and what interested them on recording sheets provided. Everyone seemed to enjoy the leisurely walk.

As on the previous trip a few years ago we did not see the White Helleborine/Orchid *Epipactis veratrifolia* in flower. This plant forms an interesting association with the Maidenhair Fern *Adiantum capillus veneris*. We did, however, see five members of the Cruciferae family, including the pink crucifer *Erucaria hispanica*. Other plants included the lily *Asphodelus fistulosus*. It was an excellent location for looking at plants as can be seen from our list. Not much animal life was recorded. After lunch we slowly made our way back to Dubai.

A summary of our finds:  
Plants

*Physorhynchus chamaerapistrum*,  
*Erucaria hispanica*, *Sisymbrium srysimoides*, *Savigny parriflora*,  
*Boerhavia clogans*, *Diplotaxis harra*,  
*Asphodelus fistulosus*,  
*Suaeda aegyptiaca*, *Rumex vesicarius*, *Erodium laciniatum*,  
*Lagonia indica*, *Heliotropium calcareum*, *Aizoon canariense*,  
*Tribulus terrestris*, *Chenopodium murale*, *Anagallis arvensis*,  
*Chenopodium album*, *Oxalis corniculata*, *Melilotis indicus*,  
*Malva aegyptiaca*, *Solanum nigrum*, *Senecio flavus*, *Cleome rypicola*, *Reichardia tingitana*,  
*Forskalea tenacissima*, *Sonchus oleraceus*, *Argyrolobium roseum*,  
*Centaureum pulchellum*,  
*Tephrosia apollinea*, *Mlogia spicata*, *Artemisia hispidissima*,  
*Cassia italica*, *Echinops sp.*,  
*Aerva javanica*, *Chloris virgata*,  
*Sporobolus spicatus*, *Cenchrus ciliaris*, *Eleocharis geniculata*,  
*Cyperus sp.*, *Comales surathensis*, *Phragmites australis*, *Nerium nuscataense*,  
*Epipactis veratrifolia* (not in flower), *Adiantum capillus-*

*veneris*, *Agave americana* (single specimen), *Ziziphus spina-christi*, *Acacia sp.*,  
Mango trees, date palms,  
*Cuscuta planiflora*,  
*Dyerophytum indicum*,  
*Salvia macilenta*,  
*Peronychia arabica*, *Umui Majus*.

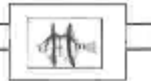
The full list of findings is available from Valerie Chalmers

### Fossil Trip to Jebel Raudah

28 members set out on 9<sup>th</sup> March to visit Jebel Raudah. This is a fossil site where late Cretaceous marine sediments directly overlie ophiolite on the northern side and at the south eastern end they rest on deformed and steeply dipping sedimentary rocks of the Hawasina group. We went to the south-eastern end and set out to see what fossils might be found. Lots of gastropods including many examples of the flattened type (*Trochanaea*), several specimens of *Acteonella*, over 40 specimens of *Natica*, 1 specimen of the large gastropod *Campanile* and many assorted snails were seen. Bivalves found included *Naïthea*, lophate oysters, mussels, cockles and *Scabrotrigonia* (*Trigoniidae*). A few specimens of rudists (a special type of bivalve, now extinct) were seen. These included the very large *Diclyoplychus*, the small almost tooth-like *Glabroboumonia* and possible *Durania* fragments. Over 60 specimens of the solitary diacoidal (button-like) coral *Cunoolites* were found. Specimens of the echinoderm *Glabator*, *Conulus*, *Coenolactypus*, *Saionia*, *Hattopsis* and *Faujasia* were of added interest. Possibly the skull of a hyrax and a fish fossil were also found.

After an identification session the members made their way back to Dubai.

Reports by Valerie Chalmers



## Trip to Bat Tombs

Peter and Anne van Amsterdam organised this trip. The rendezvous was midday on Thursday 22 Feb at Ibrī, about 120 km inside Oman.

At the Bat tombs the group found a shaded spot in a cultivated date palm area and enjoyed lunch followed by a short climb up to see the tombs. The five thousand year old tombs perched high on a ridge provoked a lively discussion among the group. Who were they built for - was it for tribal leaders? Why were they placed in a line on a ridge? Did the mountain behind have any religious significance? These stone constructions were similar in structure to the tombs found at the base of Jebel Hafit. However these tombs appeared to be slightly higher and more conical in size. Sadly there appears to be little more known about them, which just adds to the intrigue and mystery of the ancient cultures of Oman.

Delayed by a series of punctures and with darkness only a few minutes away Peter at last managed to lead the group to a camp site on Jebel Shams.

Everyone rose fresh for Friday's trip to Wadi Nakhr. Setting off we stopped at a couple of vantage points to enjoy the view as we ascended.

Villagers with carpets, wool key rings, fossils etc magically appeared at the speed of light from the village below and returned to their dwellings lighter of load and richer from the proceeds of their sales to members of the party.

We continued on until we reached Wadi Nakhr. Here there was a small village that we walked through to reach the valley. Descending down just a few feet the majority of the group set off on what turned out to be a stunning walk along a path on the edge of the valley. After about two hours along one side, with an uninterrupted view of the other side, and having sighted some eagles,

we came to an amazing little settlement at the end of the gorge, perched high up the mountain, and complete with terraced fields. Just before the village the group had also noticed some interesting structures attached to the roof of an overhang.

Half an hour was spent exploring the now deserted village and again conjecture about why it was built and the hardship of living in such a place dominated the discussion.

Reluctantly we headed back to the rest of the non-walking group who had spent four and a half hours with the villagers. It appeared the return of the walkers, albeit much later than estimated, was a welcome respite from the Omari villagers' 'sales pitch'. The group then travelled back down the mountain, and headed back to Dubai.

Soccia thanks to Peter and Anne for organising a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. The spectacular walk along the side of Wadi Nakhr, for those lucky enough to take part, was a memory that will not be easily forgotten.

*Report by Michael Lorrigan*

## Moby Dog

Far up Wadi Dafan in mid-February, Peter Cunningham became unusually watchful and preoccupied. We had seen a surprising amount of litter, mostly plastic bags, in this out of the way location, and also a surprising number of human footprints in the wadi gravel. More litter upstream indicated that there may have been a small-scale military exercise. But along with the footprints were animal tracks. Big tracks.

Probably a dog, Peter said at first, a big dog travelling with the people. But then it began to appear — even to less experienced observers — that the animal prints were much more recent than the human footprints. Carnivore, Peter insisted, large carnivore — leopard size, or maybe large caracal. And recent, very recent.

The group almost consciously hushed. We rounded a bend in the narrow wadi and John Martin, in the lead, stopped in his tracks.

Ahead, from some meters up the right bank, a large white dog rose and descended to the wadi, quickly but with grace and dignity — a necessary precaution, not a frenzied scramble. He (or she? — we couldn't tell) was short haired, with a big head and a bare crest, an erect, curling tail, and erect but bent ears, like the RCA Victor dog, and white but for the barest black accents. He eyed us briefly, then turned and loped up the wadi. Discretion is the better part of valor.

We never saw him again, but tracks in silt a few hundred meters up the wadi suggested the possibility of a second dog. Why? When? How? Who knows? He may be able to survive by killing goats, Peter suggested, as feral dogs are known to do in South Africa. It's unlikely, however, that he would have been resident in the immediate area for more than six months, due to the lack of water before rains in late August.

*Report by Gary Feulner*



## More White Crab Spiders

The mention of a white crab spider on a white laban container in the February 2001 Gazelle has prompted two subsequent reports. Peter Cunningham found an off-white female crab spider camouflaged on an off-white fungus that had been picked or broken and was lying among wadi gravel. And Marijke Jongbloed reports having found a whitish female on the grey-white succulent stems of a rare yellow *Caralluma* (see also the report on yellow *Carallumas* on Page 5).

*Report by Gary Feulner*



*E.mail your reports to pvana@emirates.net.ae, (Arial 10 justified) or deliver them on floppy disk at monthly meetings.*

## Eastern Desert Rambles: A Potpourri and Potshards

Geoff Cosson and Gary Feulner took advantage of 'Eid al-Adha' (Feb. 24-25) for touring and a number of walkabouts in the desert west of A-Wigan, i.e., SW of Al Ain. Among other things, they inspected a number of the larger ghaf groves in the area to check for breeding birds (paired buzzards and nesting eagle owls, kestrels and brown-necked ravens are all known from this area). Although they found more than a dozen large nests in all, none of these were inhabited, leading them to suppose either that breeding and fledging are completed by late February or that the area is not currently as attractive for brooding as it once was. The latter is consistent with an observed decline in vegetation due to persistent drought and camel grazing, and also with an apparent increase in the cutting or stripping of the ghaf trees for use as fodder.

Michael Jennings of ARRA commented on these observations as follows: 'I think the Brown Necked Raven does quite a social service in the desert as most of their nests get recycled in some way. Neither Eagle owl nor kestrel make their own nests but will readily use an old BNR nest. I have also found a Lanner nest in an old BNR nest. I think probably LL Buzzards will also use a raven's nest as a basis for their own. Raven nests are always worth a close look if you can because even when they are old they might have a lodger. However I do not know of any instances where a raven has reused its own nest.'

Mike was more optimistic (too optimistic?) about the ghafs: 'Ghaf trees get lopped quite regularly elsewhere in Eastern Arabia, I have seen it quite a lot in Oman also in the northern Emirates in 1970. (The acacia and zizyphus is also much lopped elsewhere in Arabia). I suppose the recent drought and lack of grazing has brought the old practices back into use. The trees seem to recover.'

Geoff and Gary also hunted for animal tracks, by day and by night, and found quite a number, including cape hare, red fox, white-spotted lizard, probable scorpion and beetle tracks, as well as a number of enigmatic, twisting tracks that remain to be identified. In one area Geoff was able to identify and trace the extensive wanderings of a monitor lizard. Some of the tracks were so well preserved that it was possible to see the imprint of individual scales on the soles of the feet!

One of the most unusual observations was archaeological. Geoff found the remains of a broken pottery vessel in low dunes beside a broad sand and gravel valley some 40 km west of Al-Wigan. It is uncommon to find pottery of any sort in the desert and the area west of Al-Wigan is poorly explored. The particular site in question lies along a natural 'easy travel' route consisting of a chain of elongated sabkha flats that still flood after heavy rains. It may therefore represent a regular route for traditional tribal residents of the area. Several potshards were collected and labelled, and will be deposited with the archaeological museum in Al-Ajn.

## Loew's Blue Butterfly

On four successive weekends in March and April, DNHG members hiking in various parts of the higher Rufus al-Jibal spotted an unusual and 'relatively large "little blue" butterfly, a much deeper, more vivid royal blue than most of this group of small Lycaonic butterflies. One

party managed to take a photograph of the diagnostic underside. Comparison with the colour plates in Torben Larsen's Butterflies of Saudi Arabia and its Neighbours appears to confirm the preliminary diagnosis of Loew's Blue (*Agrodaelus loewii*), an arid zone specialist better known from north and central Saudi Arabia, but also collected from the Musandam region (Khasab) by Torben Larsen himself. Its presence in two such disparate places may be due to the presence of its larval foodplant, the spiny milk vetch *Astragalus spinosus* and, in the Musandam, its close relative *Astragalus faaciculifolius* (indeed, it may yet prove to be the case that both plant species are found in the Musandam). The female is normally brown but also has a blue colour form like the male, which may help to explain why only blue ones have so far been seen this spring in the Musandam. Thanks to Peter Cunningham and Barbara Couldrey for their reports.

Report by Gary Feulner

## Our Next Speaker

Dr. habil. Ulrich Wernery has been a DNHG member since coming to Dubai in 1987 as Scientific Director of Dubai's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory. He is a microbiologist and Doctor of Veterinary Science, specializing in the diagnosis of diseases in camels, falcons, poultry, horses, small ruminants and cattle. He has published a textbook on infectious diseases of camels (recently updated) and also studies the haematological and biochemical reference values of racing camels, falcons and horses in tropical climates. Outside the laboratory, Ull is an avid birdwatcher and photographer and desert camper. Among other things, he tries to stay young by playing field hockey.





## Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

### Reptiles - Dr Reza Khana

res 344 8283  
 cell 344 0462  
 fax (off) 349 9137

### Archaeology - Volunteer required

Birds - David Sadling  
 res 3517147  
 fax 2950753  
 050 - 5526308

### Scorpions - Sandy Fowler

res 344 2243  
 fax 344 2743

### Astronomy - Lamejed El Kufi

res 06-583 003  
 off 06 247 958

### Marine Life - Lamejed El Kufi

Geology - Gary Feulner  
 res 306 5570  
 fax 330 3550

### Insects - Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerio Chelazzi  
 res 349 4816,  
 fax 398 3727

### Plants - Valerio Chelazzi

Mammals - Marijke Jongh'neel  
 res 319 7963  
 fax 349 7963

[ujonghblid@emirates.net.ae](mailto:ujonghblid@emirates.net.ae)

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 *Journal* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

## Shelling Workshop

Sandy Fowler has been forced to postpone this workshop until May 3. Please contact him for further information.

## Stalking the Yellow Caralluma: A Natural History Odyssey

One of the most distinctive mountain plants in UAE is the Caralluma, a milkweed plant (Family Asclepiadaceae) that looks very much like a cactus. These have been in flower in most areas in January and February. Although milkweeds are generally considered unpalatable or even toxic, local mountain residents are known to eat the tender new shoots, and Barbara Coudrey and Geoff Cosson have independently reported seeing whole stalks of Caralluma for sale in the fruit and vegetable section of local outdoor markets.

Virtually all of the Caralluma found in the UAE are the purple flowering species, Caralluma arabica. However, high in the area of Wadi Farfar and Wadi Mimduk, which flow to the East Coast, is a population of the very similar but yellow-flowering Caralluma flava, a species better known from southern Oman. This population was first recognised and reported by Minie van de Weg of Fujairah.

A single specimen of C. flava was found a couple of years ago in Wadi Sfal on the west flank of the Hajar Mountains by the DNHG's Peter Payne, flowering on a damp and cloudy February day. Subsequent visits to the area in the "off season" revealed an abundance of Caralluma at higher elevations (500-900m), but no plants in flower or seed for positive identification.

Gary Feulner and Geoff Cosson returned to Wadi Sfal last month to investigate further. They found the original specimen of C. flava in flower, as well as a substantial number of flowering C. arabica in the immediate area. Along the nearby ridgetop of Jebel Samah, however, most Caralluma were not in flower and those that were, were purple C. arabica.

Their ascent route took them up the switchbacks of an abandoned donkey trail across a low pass, linking the west flank of the mountains with the East Coast. There Geoff spotted a single potshard, a nice piece with a well defined, raised lip and attractive glaze - a pale green background with turquoise and black markings. This was labelled as to location and circumstances and has been given to the National Museum of Ras Al-Khaimah, hopefully making a contribution to the better understanding of the history of this East-West "trade route" across the Hajar Mountains.

As they approached the summit of Jebel Samah, around the mountain came a griffon vulture at close range, less than 100 meters. Despite the proximity, identification was not entirely simple at eye level, with the bird seen only in profile. The large size, relatively small head and ostentatiously short tail made it a vulture, but the pale, coffee-and-cream coloured mantle distinctive of the griffon could be seen well only when the bird had glided almost a kilometre away, this without over a beat of its wings.

By far the most unusual ridgetop sighting of all, however, was of two brightly clad European ladies descending from a ridge. Gary and Geoff could scarcely believe the eyes, since this was the first time that either of them had ever encountered other expats aloft on the mountains! More was their surprise when it transpired that the ladies were hospital colleagues of Minie van de Weg, who told enviously of seeing numerous yellow Caralluma flava on their ascent route from the East Coast.

*Report by Gary Feulner*

## Letters to the editor News? Views?

Please write to us at PO Box 9234, or fax/e-mail Anne Milon or any of the committee members listed on Page 7.



## Egg-citement: An Arabian "First" Nest

Barbara Coudrey checked in with a cheerful weekend report in mid-February. "Fields were ablaze with wild iris and gladlol," she said, and also mentioned "a clutch of 9 Chukar eggs under a plant in the fenced off field below Fina Peak (above Wadi Sha'am in RAK) - a local Omani from the nearby village 'demonstrated' quite admirably that the eggs belonged to Chukar!" Poor Barbara got only the third degree from the Chairman, who admonished that although the Chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*) is common in the high Musandam, breeding records are surely not, and should be carefully reported to the ABBA survey (Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia).

So Barbara elaborated: "My 'friend' actually showed me the eggs - I could very well have stood on the bush otherwise. They were in a neat nest under the canopy of a smallish but dense plant alongside one of the bunds. I think it was the plant [*Artemisia herba-alba*] that smells a bit like a herb (I thought he was picking a bit for me to smell when he gently pulled the foliage back). Without disturbing the eggs, they appeared light cream and a bit smaller than bantam hen size. I would say just under 3.5cm long (I should have measured them!)."

"They were all intact but I was concerned that the parent had abandoned the nest. I tried this question but it didn't work. However, I think they would have been good eating had they been abandoned. He demonstrated the beak and something around the face (the characteristic Chukar eye marking?) and went whirr, whirr with his arms. When I tried to imitate the 'Chukar' call and move my arms like Chukar wings he gave a toothy (a few grin and nodded). I would never in a month of Sundays have seen the eggs if he hadn't lifted back the canopy carefully and showed me. Maybe as the nest is in a securely fenced-in area (which

I had trespassed into to look for flowers and birds) it is safe from foxes, etc."

All this was duly reported to Mike Jennings of ABBA, whose reply was immediate: "This is exciting indeed as there is not a single record of a nest with eggs of the Chukar from Arabia (from either of the two populations - there is another population in the extreme north of Saudi Arabia). As it is such an interesting record I wonder if there is any more information about the nest that you can recall? For example was there any nesting material or were the eggs laid on the bare ground (e.g., a hollow formed by the parent in a dusty patch). Did you by any chance take a picture of the eggs, nest or bush? Had you seen or heard Chukar in the area - or any other game bird?"

"... However, there is a bit of a problem because your description of the egg 'light cream' does not really match the Chukar which has eggs of cream or buff base but spotted red brown. The soots (like the Red Legged Partridge of UK) should be visible on even a cursory inspection. The above description could also possibly apply to the Sand Partridge. That species has unspotted eggs, which are also pale sandy-buff. The amazing thing is that whilst the Sand Partridge is widespread and common over much of Arabia, its nest and eggs have also never been described from Arabia. So a nest of either species would also be very interesting indeed."

From experience, both Barbara and Gary felt that Chukar was the overwhelming favourite, but Mike was persistent: "You could still clinch the identification of this tantalizing nest if you or someone else, could revisit the nest site in 3 weeks. By that time the eggs should have hatched. Collect an egg shell, which will almost certainly be in situ at the nest site. Your record really is of exceptional interest, whatever species it turns out to be. I hope you can go that extra yard and provide enough information eventually to be certain which species

is involved."

Little did Mike know that only days before, Barbara had already "gone the extra mile" to collect, with Dee McEnery, a new species of plant from a precarious cliff site that no one else could reach. Nevertheless, before the week was out Barbara was off again in company with Peter Cunningham to get the hoped for confirmation. Soon she will have enough 'extra miles' for a frequent flier award!

They were armed with a camera, GPS, measuring stick and scales and were able to record the location and nest details, but otherwise things went badly. Writes Barbara, "The eggs had gone and not a trace of shell anywhere. I suspect a delectable breakfast was had by the 2 Omani gents who live on the plateau. We had a bird book with us and went looking for them to identify the Chukar/sand partridge, but no luck - they were nowhere to be seen. However, on the climb down we encountered another Omani (an old fellow I had met coming up in the same place a week earlier!) and we sat down with the book and discussed the eggs and birds as best we could. He was certainly familiar with some of the birds in the pictures. Peter, whose Arabic is better than mine, is now convinced that Chukar is our bird, though the little old man knew the Sand Partridge also. We 'asked' him whether the eggs were good to eat! His 3-tooth grin and demonstration of cracking eggs and putting them in his mouth were, we thought, 'fairly conclusive!'"

### Sharjah Archaeological Website

The Sharjah Department of Culture and Information maintains a website with information about Sharjah Archaeology, including news of current finds at <http://www.uapinterac.com/ancient/ar02.htm>



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Publisher	<b>Peter van Amsterdam</b>	209 2519 e.mail: pvana@emirates.net.ae	395 5495	269 1654
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## Cliff Plants

The recent discovery and sampling by DNHG members of a few *Cordia sinensis*, a large straggling shrub, on cliffs above Wadi Naqab in RAK, is a reminder that the cliff environment can be a refuge for rare species or species that have become rare, whether due to browsing or grazing by domestic stock, climate change, or competition by new or introduced species. It's also a reminder that binoculars can be as valuable to a botanist as to a bird watcher. In the wake of the *Cordia* success, I spent a day in late February having a closer look - as close as I dared - at the cliffs in the steepest, narrowest areas of Wadi Khabb Shamsi, an area where several rare plants are already known to occur.

Sure enough, I was able to find *Ehretia obtusifolia* and *Grewia tenax*, both tree size shrubs previously reported here, one growing just within reach. I also added *Grewia villosa*, identified in 1998 and known from isolated plants in several disparate mountain locations just outside UAE borders. To photograph a cliffside specimen of *Dalechampia scandens*, I had to climb through a large fig tree, which fortunately I had not quite begun when Geoff Gosson and friends happened by and stopped to say hello. The flower of this spreading Euphorb shrub has two large sepals that open like a pair of bear claws. It was new to me but Marijke Jongbloed recognized it immediately from a specimen once collected by John Martin. I could get close enough for photos, but couldn't safely reach a single one of several plants I saw in the area.

Further up the gorge, in a large, sheltered grotto about 100 meters above me, I saw a broadleaf tree I couldn't identify. It looked as if it might be approachable by scrambling, so I started up, but I quickly encountered some awkward moves. Alone, I turned around and marked it for another day when I had suitable company. Finally, just 30-50 meters above wadi level, but on a slope I don't think I'll persuade anybody to try, were two specimens of a gangly, yellow-flowering shrub I have never seen before. I have already speculated shamelessly as to its identity, based on several clues, but it would be inappropriate to do so in print. I'm now considering borrowing a spotting scope, or maybe a full fledged telescope.

Report by Gary Feulner

# GAZELLE

## Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Jumeirah English Speaking School, Gymnasium 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm

May 6	Camels: The Almost forgotten Miracle Animal	- Dr Ulrich Wernery
June 3	<b>Members' Night</b>	
	Minority Tribes of North East Burma	- Helen Emery
	Introduction to the Mayas of Guatemala	- John Fox
	Using wild plants in your garden and how to make the best use of water in gardening	- Elizabeth Craig-Maley
	Birding in the UAE	- David Snelling
<b>Field Trips</b>	(DNHG members only, please).	
April 26	Birdwatching at Al Wathba Camel Track, Abu Dhabi with David Snelling	
May 11 or 18	Return visit to the Wild Life Centre	
May 24/25	Explore the Saiq Plateau with Peter van Amsterdam	

Many thanks to Flying Colours for printing Gazelle once again, while our Publisher is on holiday

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