Members’ News

Two New Faces on the Committee

This month we are very pleased to announce that we have two new volunteers to fill Committee positions. **Rakesh Rungta** will take over the position of Treasurer from **Louisa Akerina** who now seems to be a fairly permanent and happy resident of Sri Lanka. Rakesh and family are keen field trip participants and already well known to many members.

**Gazelle** for over 10 years, and claims to have enjoyed every minute of it. Clare will be editing the November **Gazelle**, so please be thoughtful and kind - send her plenty of reports and photographs to smooth her path. We welcome both Clare and Rakesh, and the Committee looks forward to working with them!

**Heather and Roger Neal** are leaving Dubai after quite a few years here. They too were keen shelling trip participants, and Roger enjoyed photographing tiny specimens.

**Mo and Pete Steer** sent greetings from a grey and chilly UK. They report that their main task has been gardening - seven years growth has required some serious action, but they have still found time to pop down the field to their local reservoir and go bird watching, where there is a large variety of species seen. Their intention is to visit Dubai in early December and hope to time it so they can attend our Members’ Night meeting.

And **Clare O’Hare**, who is also well known to field trip participants, will take over editorship of the **Gazelle** from **Anne Millen** who will soon be a fairly permanent and happy resident of Sri Lanka too. Anne has edited the

**DNHG Membership**

DNHG Membership remains a bargain at Dhs.100 for couples/families 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. 6060069933501. (Please note we cannot cash cheques made out to the DNHG. Please also note our account number has changed.)

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips. It also 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:

- Nancy Papathanasopoulou
- Dareen Almojil
- Deanne White
- Renee Williams
- Karen Leschke
- Linda Olsen
- Aris Vidalis

Jelly fish under pink light, Atlantis aquarium Photograph by Karen Leschke

**Under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan**
Field Trips

Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort
Fri 21 Oct

As the night zoo has now stopped for the winter season we will be doing a day trip to the zoo. Meet outside the entrance gate at Al Ain Wildlife Park at 10am. A member of the educational team will be our guide. Proposed activities are reptile handling (maximum 25 people), giraffe feeding (extra cost) and the bird show. People are free, however, to wander around and view the animals at their leisure. There is a nice picnic area so we suggest members bring a picnic lunch.

Entry Dh15.00 for adults and Dh5.00 for children. If you are interested in going on the trip please send an email to Jenny Hill - promptly as time is short - on jennyhill76@hotmail.com

East Coast: Kalba to Fujairah with Brien Holmes
Fri 28 Oct

Brien Holmes has kindly agreed to lead another trip, this time to the east coast, taking us from Khalba to Fujairah with stops at various sites of interest. It will be a full day trip. Sonja is still sorting out the details with Brien, but she hopes to have it finalised today. Coordinator/contact person for the trip: sonja@publicisgraphics.ae

Kerala for Eid
4 - 12 Nov (approx.)

This nine-day trip is now closed, with a complement of 16 people.

Sharjah Museums
18 Nov

The details of this trip will be broadcast by email closer to the time. There are many museums in Sharjah, all interesting, so this will be an excellent trip for young and old. Watch for details via email.

And some trips to bear in mind pending details:

Wadi Wurraya Hike
Fri 25 Nov

Geology Trip with JP Berger
Fri 9 Dec

Shelling with Anne Millen
Fri 16 Dec

Wadi Al Shah
Fri 13 Jan 2012

Astronomy Night with JP Berger
Fri 9 Dec

InterEmirates Weekend
24 - 25 Feb 2012

The 2012 InterEmirates weekend will be hosted by the Dubai Natural History Group. Planning has already begun, and it is likely that it will be a first - held in Dubai itself! Usually it is a weekend away for Dubai’s turn to host, so this will be an exciting weekend. Planning for trips, activities and events is afoot, but if you have ideas of what you'd like to do, think others might learn from or enjoy, please contact any of the Committee members and tell them your idea.

A Call for Speakers:
Members’ Night
11 December 2011

Members’ Night will be held on December 11 this year. This is your big chance to present a talk on your favourite natural history subject. Help with Powerpoint / other technology is available, and the Speaker Coordinators will give you any assistance you need to make your presentation a really rewarding experience. Natural history topics that are related to the UAE/Middle East are preferred, but if you have a good talk on flora or fauna elsewhere, that's fine too.

Our Next Speaker

To be announced

Letters to the Editor

Do you have some comment, suggestion or query on natural history that you would like our members to know about or answer? Just want to tickle things up a bit?

Please send your letter to any of the committee members listed, by fax or email, or direct to the editor, Clare O’Hare, clare.ohare@gmail.com. Any accompanying photographs should be sent as separate, attached .jpg files.
The Lost Chambers Found by Renee Williams and Deanne White

On a hot Friday morning in September, around 60 inquisitive DNHG members gathered in the Atlantis Hotel for a very special behind-the-scenes aquarium tour. Named The Lost Chambers, the aquarium is based on the Atlantis theme. Divided into smaller groups of around ten, each group was accompanied by a knowledgeable guide quoting fish facts and the mythology of Atlantis with equal facility.

Experts from among the 165 marine specialists who manage the resort ecosystem, including vets, biologists, divers, laboratory managers, food technicians, mechanics and curators, spoke with DNHG members along the way. Among those experts was Robert Bennet, Large Exhibits Manager, who introduced us to the sharks (above).

For those who have seen the front of the large tank from the hotel side, it was a surprise to discover many additional tanks housing a huge variety of fresh and salt water fish from around the world - over 65,000 in all. The environment of the tanks is crystal clear with obviously healthy and active inhabitants.

Most mesmerizing of the exhibits were the jellyfish tanks. Members later viewed Cassiopeia andromeda (upside-down jellyfish) in the marine lab hospital where it is hoped they will successfully breed. C. andromeda is frequently found on shallow sandy bottoms in the southern Arabian Gulf.

The groups were shown the huge machinery room where the tank water is cleaned through the process of sand filters, heat exchangers, waste removal, and ozone injection. Ozone is manufactured on site to reduce transport and storage costs. A crew of 30 closely monitors all systems to ensure correct temperature and salinity. With the turnover rate in the Ambassador Lagoon at 50,000 gallons per minute, this is no small feat.
An on-site laboratory handles ongoing analysis of the marine animals and water quality. Steve Kaiser, VP, Marine Science and Engineering, stressed that they are sincerely interested in assisting with marine animal rescue and rehabilitation.

Acknowledging previous controversial press regarding a whale shark at the aquarium, Kaiser reinforced that the whale shark had been rescued from local fishermen, nursed back to health, and subsequently returned to the Gulf. After release, the tagged animal traveled to the coast of Iran and then to Oman before the monitoring device fell off in about five week’s time along the Qatar coast. Kaiser encouraged us to call the Atlantis Hotel in a timely fashion if we find a live marine animal in need of assistance, since most times when the marine mammal rescue staff learns about a situation it is often too late.

Very impressive was the quarantine area with its support for animal rescue. At the ready are two full-time vets, large marine animal carriers, and big holding tanks for rehabilitating animals.

Sponsored by TOTAL Foundation and TOTAL Kuwait since July 2008, a number of scientists and volunteers from many countries gathered in Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim several times a year in order to observe, assess and reflect upon wildlife conservation on these two ecological treasures of Kuwait.
Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Sea turtles, sharks and at least 125 fish species (not counting the long list of molluscs and crustaceans) live here, some of them breeding and some foraging on the extended reef areas. In Umm Al-Maradim, in March 2009, within three days of cold, rainy weather, KTCP members observed 45 species of birds, including 200 chiff chaffs, pipits, a rufus-tailed rock thrush and a stone curlew.

The team was, however, not prepared for two most unusual sightings, both occurring for the first time in the summer and in totally barren Qaru. Firstly, a corn crake (crex crex) was sighted on an early June morning. After a long night shift observing green turtles, the KTCP team caught a glimpse, at the crack of dawn, of an unusual, "chicken-like" bird flying under the main communications tower of the island. A closer view and the photography of team environmentalist Aris Vidalis revealed that the bird was indeed a corn crake.

Almost a full month later, in the hottest hours of the afternoon, Aris Vidalis was outside with his camera when he noticed a medium-sized bird hopping from the hot sand to the shade of the Coast Guard Station terrace, finding refuge under the team's wet towels on the benches. With great difficulty Aris approached the bird and took photos of it.

The bird then flew off to the pier of the island, where it was followed by Aris and photographed some more. Careful study of the photos revealed the bird to be a little crake (Porzana parva – the distinct red mark at the base of its bill made this identification certain). It is even more rare in Kuwait than the corn crake. These small birds, like corn crakes, belong to the Rallidae family, breed in Eastern Europe and just into Western Asia. To KTCP members' knowl-
... and a Notice

edge, they have not been reported in Kuwait before. They are supposed to winter in Africa and look for food on mudflats.

Little crake, *Porzana parva*

Both birds are abundant in their homelands and the IUCN Red List qualification for both is that of “Least Concern”. They breed in their homelands from May till August. So what were these single individuals doing during breeding season in Qaru instead? And on their own, when they always seem to travel in numbers?

The distinctive red spot is visible

Sightings such as these demonstrate the extremely high ecological importance of Qaru and Umm Al-Maradim, which, due to their geographical position, provide sanctuary to all kinds of wildlife, often creating unique opportunities for observations and raising the need for further research regarding, among others, avifauna. Barren and remote at first, without sources of freshwater, these sand cays host passing bird populations of many kinds and at all seasons. Clearly, more constant research is needed in order to discover more about their role in local and regional biodiversity and ecological processes. *Report by Nancy Papatheotanou nancyktcp@gmail.com, photographs by Aris Vidalis, Kuwait Turtle Conservation Project*

Galapagos Underwater

Located almost 1000km off the coast of Ecuador, Galapagos offers unrivalled wildlife encounters on land, as Colin Paskins’ recent photo-story showed. But what about underwater? We joined a dive trip recently to find out for ourselves.

Hammerheads galore

Our next dives yielded large shoals of big eye jacks, a dolphin and many more sharks. Moving on to Wolf Island, the sharks were joined by a family of eagle rays which allowed us to get really close, plus large pelagics such as blue finned and giant trevally and, on the surface, a large pod of bottlenose dolphins.

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As we sped along the wall in the current a huge yellowfin tuna then a manta flew past; on the sand numerous green turtles and the grumpy looking red lipped batfish sat motionless and in the shallows a Galapagos penguin made a brief appearance.

So after 10 days and almost 30 dives, what can we say? Well, Galapagos is certainly a challenging dive destination because of the cold and the currents, but for the chance to dive with marine life that you just don’t find anywhere else, and the sheer quantity of large marine life, we now know that it’s just as fantastic underwater as it is on land. Report by Angela Manthorpe, photographs by Angela and from internet.

A Domestic in Suburbia
In residential Jumeira, right on busy Al Wasl Road, a family of grey francolin regularly feed in my garden. They have visited it for years, and once nested here. They seem to be a family because at present there are two large ones and one smaller. The smaller one is always between the mature birds. Dad (or Mum) walks slowly along in the lead, neck stretched high, not feeding but observing. The smaller one and the tail-end-Charlie keep following but feed voraciously on, I think, grass seed. They notice even minimal movement behind tinted glass in daytime. One day, I tried to photograph them when they were dozing in a dustbath, but they are ever vigilant, and purposefully decamped.

Perhaps they are nesting again, or scouting for a place. Recently, I noticed some movement behind a low bush, and was intermittently monitoring it when a pale, pretty dove (a frequent visitor too) alighted on the lawn in front. There was a flurry of grey, some harsh noises and posturing and the dove was quickly and firmly seen off. Then the two big ones emerged with an air of indignation, stalking off across the garden with necks stretched high. Text and photographs by Anne Millen

Firewood: Free to a Good Campsite
Planning a desert dinner, camping expedition or singsong round a campfire? Anne Millen has firewood for all. A big tree has fallen in her garden, and there are lots of small to mid-sized branches for the taking. And the trunk if you can do anything with that! Call Anne on 050-4556372 or Peter on 050-6425077. Bring an axe, a saw ... whatever you have.
Dubai Natural History Group Programme

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

Nov 13   To be announced
Dec 11   Members’ Night

Field Trips (Members only, please)

Oct 21   Al Ain zoo
Oct 28   East coast: Kalba to Fujairah
Nov 4 - 12   Kerala nature trip
Nov 18   Sharjah museums

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