

TRIBULUS



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Cover Illustrations:

Front: A *Truxalis procera* Klug, photographed in the desert near Lihbab. Picture by Simon Aspinall

Back: *Acacia tortilis* and *Euphorbia larica* near Masafi. Picture by Simon Aspinall.

The Editorial Board of TRIBULUS and the Committee of the Emirates Natural History Group acknowledge, with thanks, the support of the Group's Corporate members, a full list of whom can be found on Page 2, and without whom publication would be impossible. We also acknowledge the support and encouragement of our Patron, H.E. Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Minister of Higher Education & Scientific Research.

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The report, by Martina Fella, was as follows:

"I thought it might be of some interest to the DNHG that yesterday morning (17th October) we saw a group of dugongs only a few hundred metres from the shore, in front of the open beach next to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel. They were definitely dugongs and not dolphins. There were about 10-12 animals, amongst them also young ones. We observed them from our boat, (a catamaran) but they seemed very shy and it was difficult to approach them closely, (although at one point we got as close as about 5 metres).

After watching for more than half an hour, we decided it was best to leave them alone again. We had the impression that the dugongs had lost orientation as they kept moving back and forth within the same area."

With the very extensive offshore construction and dredging in this area, with much noise from these activities, as well as the disturbance to underwater visibility and to feeding grounds, like seagrass beds, a loss of orientation certainly seems likely!

(Source: *The Gazelle*)

Launch of new ornithological journal - *Podoces*.

The first issue of the West and Central Asian Ornithological Journal, '**PODOCES**', was published late in 2006. It is named after Pleske's Ground Jay (*Podoces pleskei*), a resident Iranian endemic. Papers are in English, with their abstracts also in Persian, or vice versa, while short communications appear in both English and Persian. The editorial board has embraced the issue of language and the journal succeeds well in both lay-out and accessibility of the material, whichever your preferred language. Currently bi-lingual, papers written in Russian are to appear in future issues.

A range of papers in the first issue cover such topics as the status of houbara in Iran, tracking vultures in the Caucasus, various breeding and wintering bird surveys and a case of avian cholera. Short communications cover unusual sightings (including snowy owl and waxwing, both in Iran) and miscellaneous observations, status reports and the results of various surveys (e.g. larks feeding on oilseed rape) amongst other subjects.

Published by WESCA, Wildlife Network & Bird Conservation Society for Iran, the first issue is dominated by Iranian topics and includes an updated bird checklist for the country.

The editor, Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, may be contacted at the following e-mail address: akhaleghizadeh@yahoo.com.

Simon Aspinall

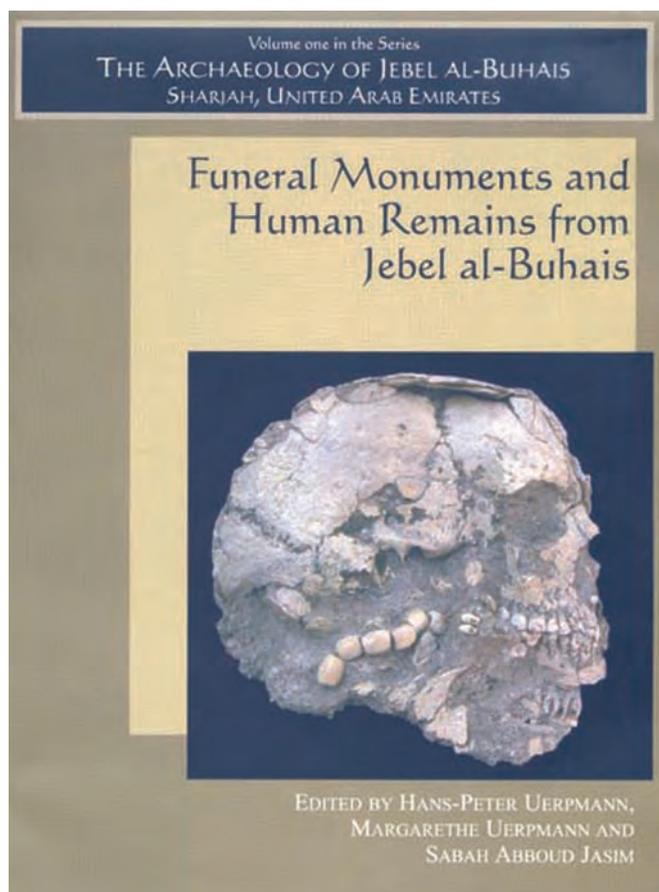
Coleoptera

Conrad Gillett, the son of our Advisory Board member and frequent contributor Michael Gillett (and a contributor himself) has recently been appointed to the post of Curator of Coleoptera in the Department of Entomology at London's Natural History Museum. During his work, we hope that he will keep a close eye on UAE-related matters!

For those readers who may wish to contact him, his e-mail address is: c.gillett@nhm.ac.uk

Book Reviews

Funeral Monuments and Human Remains from Jebel al-Buhais. The Archaeology of Jebel Al-Buhais, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, Vol.1.



Hans-Peter Uerpmann, Margarethe Uerpmann and Sabah Abboud Jasim (eds.), 2006. Department of Culture & Information, Government of Sharjah, UAE, Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters Universität Tübingen, Germany, and Kerns Verlag, Tübingen. 385 pages. Hardback. ISBN: 3-935751-06-0

This volume is the first in a series of volumes covering the archaeology, natural environment and ancient cultures of Jebel Buhais. It is intended to present an overview of the explorations carried out by the Sharjah Directorate of Antiquities, in cooperation with the Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters Universität Tübingen, Germany.

Volume 1 largely concerns the description of human remains from the numerous grave structures found in this area. It is divided into three parts:

Part 1, written by Sabah Abboud Jasim, discusses "The Archaeological Sites of Jebel Al-Buhais" (pages 13-63). It provides an overview of the archaeology with clear plans, photographs and illustrations of the excavated material which dates to the Neolithic, Hafit, Wadi Suq, Iron Age and Hellenistic periods. The astounding continuity of funeral sites in the al-Buhais area throughout different prehistoric periods is quite remarkable.

Part 2, written by Adelina Uerpmann, Johannes Schmitt, Nicole Nicklisch and Michaela Binder, discusses "Post-Neolithic Human Remains from the Jebel Al-Buhais Area" (pages 69-99). They summarise the results of material excavated by the Sharjah team between 1994-1995, as well as material collected from the open sites by the Joint Al-Buhais Project from 1996 to 1999. It provides a significant amount of evidence linking the area to the known developments of human populations in the wider Gulf region during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Part 3, written by Henrike Kiesewetter, forms the major component of this volume. Entitled "Analyses of the Human Remains from the Neolithic Cemetery at al-Buhais 18 (Excavations 1996-2000)" (pages 103-265), she presents a detailed study of the skeletal remains from the cemetery which formed her PhD thesis at the University of Tübingen.

Appendix A is a catalogue of all the burials analysed in part 3 (pages 267-331).

Appendix B are all the data tables pertaining to part 3, including details of all preservation, sex and age information, bone measurements and non-metrical traits (pages 333-380). An index completes the volume (pages 381-385).

The discovery of the Neolithic graveyard of Al-Buhais 18 was a major event in the history of archaeological research in southeastern Arabia. It provided for the first time a window onto the early inhabitants of this region. The human remains buried some 6000 to 7000 years ago were often adorned with a fascinating range of personal adornments.

This monograph represents the results of ten field seasons which took place between 1996 and 2005. Both the Directorate of Antiquities of the Department of Culture and Information of the Government of Sharjah, as well as the Institute of Pre- and Protohistory and Medieval Archaeology of the University of Tübingen, should be congratulated for the production of this handsome volume. It sets new standards for archaeological publication in the United Arab Emirates. Systematic anthropological analyses of human remains from southeastern Arabia are still relatively scant. This detailed study provides valuable new information about the Neolithic herders, fishers and foragers of the region, as well as the Bronze and Iron Age agriculturalists and craftsmen.

As Henrike Kiesewetter writes in the concluding sentence to the volume she is "fortunate at having made a contribution to the understanding of the lifeways, the subsistence and living conditions of the early inhabitants of the Oman peninsula".

Mark Beech

A. van Harten (2005). *Insects of the UAE: A Checklist of Published Records*. Dar Al Ummah, Abu Dhabi

The title encompasses the scope of this book; it brings together almost all known records from the literature into one source. The introduction sets the stage as to why records in the UAE are 'relatively unexploited', i.e. the lack of targeted cataloguing.

Van Harten mentions the lack of national collections and whilst, to some extent this is correct, the collection at the Environmental Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD) is significant, and the private collection of the combined Al Ain and Abu Dhabi ENHGs are also important in their contribution to entomological knowledge.

The objective of the book, however, is to clearly list known species. To that end, each species name is accompanied by its original author, the year of description, and every reference where the record was published. As the compilation is truly meant to be a species list, there are no illustrations or photographs. The classification used adheres mainly to that used by 'Fauna Europaea' with species listed in alphabetical order within families.

The records are comprehensive but not all inclusive. Records published in the predecessor of *Tribulus*, the *Bulletin of the Abu Dhabi Natural History Group*, have been ignored. The reasons are understandable. Records where specimens are not present for verification cause a problem. Misidentifications are commonplace. Furthermore, frequently

additional knowledge on the classification of certain groups forces re-examination of specimens and, if those are missing, the record becomes suspect. Interestingly, records subsequently appearing in refereed journals (the *Bulletin* was not refereed) have often confirmed records originally quoted in the 'Bulletins'. This season the specimens collected and reported by the authors of the *Bulletin* records were re-discovered in storage, which will allow the *Bulletin* records to be validated. Therefore, rather more recorded species exist in the UAE than are listed in the book, including species lists submitted for publication which have not yet made it to press but precede the publication under discussion.

Despite the occasional typographical errors (e.g. in year of description by original authors, misspellings of species names and original authors), and the unfortunate switch of Gillett and Howarth (2004) to Howarth and Gillett (2004) throughout, the book is useful for those studying the biodiversity of insects in the UAE as UAE records are scattered throughout the literature. *Insects of the UAE* ensures that most knowledge to date is consolidated in one place and forms a sound foundation for extending our records of UAE insects in the future.

Brigitte Howarth

Discovering Qatar by Frances Gillespie
2006. Softback, 148 pp. with photographs on every page.

Buy it, read it, and you certainly will discover Qatar.

The author, Fran Gillespie, has lived in our neighbour, Qatar, for over twenty years and has devoted her time profitably to studying the archaeology and natural history of her adopted home. In this, her first solo title, she has done well to distill the essence of the country into a solid, informative read. It has an easy style which means you can just dip into individual chapters in any order, that's if you don't get so engrossed that you read it cover to cover in one go.

The history of Qatar, the significance of the colour purple (and the gastropod source of the dye), boat petroglyphs, pearling, abandoned ancient settlements, forts and various other archaeological and historical interest vie with later chapters which describe the formation of dunes, singing sands, place-names, truffle-hunting, tracking wildlife, miscellaneous indigenous land mammals, reptiles, scorpions and camel spiders, turtles, sea-snakes, marine mammals and more besides, such as stonefish, stingrays and lion fish, but not forgetting mangroves, ospreys, Socotra cormorants.....

See, I told you: this is a jam-packed volume, full of anecdote and unusual facts and well-worth the read. And it will complement nicely any titles from the Motivate series on UAE subjects that you may happen to have.

Sponsored by RasGas Company Ltd., this book is available from the author for 100 dhs plus p&p via: gillespi@qatar.net.qa or tel. +974-4675991. (A copy has been lodged in the ENHG library for anyone who cares to view before purchasing).

I thoroughly recommend it.

Simon Aspinall