

2010/11 SEASON

Qatar Natural History Group

Newsletter # 1
September 2010





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Front Cover Picture: 'A Curious Fox' by Dileep Kumar.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

I am pleased to welcome you all to another season of activities with the QNHG. We have already organized our speaker programme through to December and the presentations all look to be very interesting. The December programme in particular will be likely to be memorable with the very distinguished Professor Dionisius A. Agius, visiting from the University of Exeter, UK, giving a presentation on the *Classic Ships of Islam*.

For our first meeting in October we will, as we always do, ask our members old and new to come a little earlier and enjoy a bit of socializing before the meeting (this is also an opportunity to pay your dues for 2010/11, which remain unchanged from last season. Further details may be found on page 21).

A new feature this year will be the introduction of membership cards and car decals (identifying you as a QNHG member with the message to Keep Qatar Clean). These will be distributed to paid-up members at the November meeting.

The programme of field trips and Rambles around Qatar is taking shape, beginning with a

birding Dhow cruise at the end of October (see page 18 for details). As soon as the daytime heat moderates a bit (usually by early November), we will start going out into the desert and I am certainly looking forward to that. We expect to visit all parts of the Peninsula, from the Inland Sea to Northern tip. Trips will be planned at least twice a month on either Fridays or Saturdays. Help with organising and leading the trips is always welcomed and if more people become involved we can expand the schedule to cover more weekends.

We plan on a robust programme of international trips for members, not just over the Eid holidays, but also over the December and Spring school holidays. More information on these trips will be sent to you soon, it is not too late to sign-up for the November Eid trip to Egypt-Sinai.

We are fortunate in having all of our Steering Committee chairs continuing in their roles this fall. We will, however, need a new Librarian before the end of the year as Mark Murase, our current Librarian, and his family, will be returning to Brisbane in December. Louise Hunter, our newsletter editor (and general helper in just about anything else that needs to get done) will also be leaving. She is happy to help from afar, but we will need someone on the ground here. As I mentioned earlier, we also seek additional members of the Rambles committee who are willing to lead or organise trips (not sure how to do this?—help will be provided). Anyone wanting to help out is invited to talk to one of the Steering Committee members at any meeting or to email us.

I look forward to seeing you at our meetings and Rambles.

Welcome to the new season!

**Michael Lesser
Chairman, QNHG**





NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S MESSAGE

I arrived in Doha in September 2007 for the start of the school term. I knew about the QNHG before I came to Qatar and immediately signed up as a member. The following year I 'joined' the committee. A casual comment to the then chairman, Jens-Ole, that I would be willing to help out with anything minor led to my taking on the role of newsletter editor. Having never done anything like it before, I was, to say the least, a little anxious. However, with lots of encouragement and the template of the previous issue to guide me I managed to put something together in time for the first meeting of the year.

Just over two years and 9 issues of the QNHG newsletter later I will be very sorry to hand over to the next editor. Although frustrating at times when you might be waiting for information to arrive from contributors, I can say honestly that creating the newsletter has been immensely enjoyable, rewarding and I have learnt a lot of new skills along the way. If you feel that you would like to take on a fun new challenge and be part of the QNHG team, please don't hesitate to come forward.

Many thanks to the following for their contributions to the first newsletter of the 2010/11 season:

- Betula Omar
- Roeland Weisfelt
- Mark Murase
- Fran Gillespie
- Brian Hunter

The QNHG Newsletter would not be so informative and interesting without your input. If you have any announcements to make, information of goings-on in Qatar, news concerning natural history or any other item that you think members would be interested in, we want to hear from you. We would like, in particular, any articles sharing your travel experiences in the region or information that may be useful to others just starting out on their adventure in Qatar.

Please send any articles, information or announcements to newsletter-editor@qnhg.org or hunterlm95@yahoo.com and put 'QNHG Newsletter' in the subject line. Please send photographs separately and make sure to label them. See page 14 for announcements from the Tuesday Ladies Group, the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar Bird Club etc.

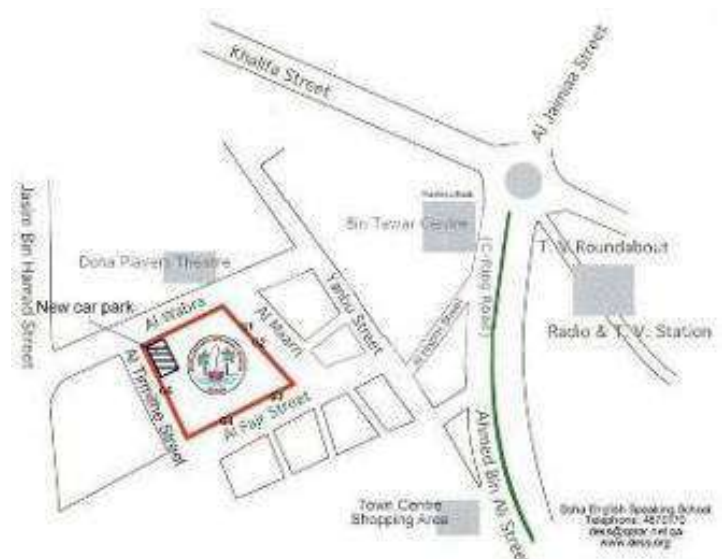
Also, if you have any comments about the newsletter or suggestions as to how it might be improved please send those too. Remember to check the website regularly for updates regarding our talks programme and other activities.

This issue of the newsletter is available on the QNHG website, together with previous issues which can be found in the archive section.

Louise Hunter
Newsletter Editor

QNHG MEETING DETAILS

QNHG meetings take place between October and June, usually on the **first Wednesday of the month**. Please note that the dates for the first three meetings of the 2010/2011 season will be: **Oct 6th, Nov 3rd & Dec 1st**. Further details about our speakers may be found on page 16. Meetings are held at **7.00 pm in the Multipurpose hall of the Doha English Speaking School (DESS)**. [See location map]. However, the location of meetings may sometimes be changed to the smaller **gymnasium at DESS**. An illustrated talk follows any announcements, and there is a lending library of books available to members, with over 200 books and journals to choose from.





LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mr. Michael Lesser,

Greetings from the UNESCO Office in Doha.

Allow me to congratulate you for all the hard and good work you do in the Qatar Natural History Group. I am impressed, also with the good quality of the very informative newsletter, of which I received the May Issue. Please keep sending me future issues.

I find the article of Dr. Tobias Richter particularly impressive and highly valuable for the development of Al Zubara. This work is certainly highly important for the Zubara site, which the Qatari Authorities have listed on their Tentative List for UNESCO World Heritage sites. The list was developed in 2008, with the assistance of the UNESCO Doha Office. However, I would like to clarify that contrary to what the article says; UNESCO has never received a submission from Qatar, to list Zubara as Qatar's first cultural World Heritage Site.

The development of the Tentative List is only an initial step. In order to have a site listed, it requires a lot more work and scientific accuracy. For the listing it requires a professional nomination file with scientifically correct information, including a management plan, an officially authorized signature, and that needs to be submitted to the World Heritage Centre at UNESCO. This file will then be reviewed by numerous experts at the World Heritage Centre, as well as ICOMOS as UNESCO's external advisory body. ICOMOS will then make a recommendation to the World Heritage Committee, which consist of 21 representatives of the State Parties to the World Heritage Convention, elected by their General Assembly. The Committee has the final say on whether a property is inscribed into the list or not. They will also take action in case a site is not properly managed.

I thought I would point this out so that your members and readers do understand that, should Zubara ever become a world heritage site, it would first require a lot of additional and scientifically accurate work and documentation.

Kind regards and keep up the good work,

Benno Böer

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INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL WITH QNHG

QNHG Overseas trips provide not just a great trip, but give the opportunity to travel with a group of other QNHG members to share the experience. Note that whilst these trips are limited to members, friends of members are welcome; all they need to do is to join the QNHG. Included below are two inspiring reports of trips taken by QNHG members to Egypt and Syria.

Patricia Grindley is our new Overseas Trip coordinator and she hopes to offer a number of trips for members this year coinciding with not just the Eid holidays, but also other holiday periods. The trip for the November Eid will be a visit to **Egypt – Sinai**, including Sharm-El-Sheik, Mt Sinai, Red Sea, St. Catherine's, Taba Heights etc. Seasonal trips in December and April are planned for **Italy** - Vatican City, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Capri, Brindisi, Otranto, Puglia, Sicily and to **Oman** - Al Ain, Muscat, Jebel Shams, Nizwah, Sink-hole, wadi-bashing etc. Further information may be found on the QNHG website plus a useful packing guide to help you remember all those essential little items that we all need but



often forget to take along! www.qnhg.org/activities/overseastrips . For any further queries, comments, suggestions, please contact Patricia at overseas-trips-coordinator@qnhg.org.

AN EID HOLIDAY TO REMEMBER

If you think this is going to be a history lesson forget it. I am a traveller who goes by the Lonely Planet guides and internet research. I am probably more interested in the beauty of the landscape and its people, rather than delving too deeply into history, past conflicts or family relationships, be they gods or pharaohs.

They say that the winter months are the best time to visit Egypt but after talking to our guides I have come to the conclusion that visiting during the Eid breaks is much friendlier if you are like me and dislike too many tourists.

Julie and I flew to Luxor which is a pleasant short trip and as it was not directly a tourist stop the flight was not too busy. I had contacted the Sheraton Hotel to ensure there was a car waiting but as you would expect the driver was nowhere to be seen. Eventually we arrived at the hotel which needed some tender loving care. The room did have lovely views over the Nile, which is a must when staying on the Nile. We hired a driver and guide and this was worthwhile as you quickly missed the tourist buses.

Day one (around 6 hours) enables you to visit the Valley of the Kings visiting three tombs and Valley of the Queen. The Ramses family had tombs everywhere. What is a pity it is that you cannot take photos. Visiting a souvenir factory was worth the visit on our way home.



Nile River Luxor

brehtaking. The Obelisk of Hatshepsut and the pylons were very impressive just like the Luxor Temple. Get there before the crowds. The two temples will be reunited again by a 3 km avenue of sphinxes. You will have to wait for several years till they demolish buildings and start digging for the road. Two days in Luxor was ample and 6 hours a day gives you time to rest and play. Don't forget to visit a genuine papyrus shop. It is interesting how they make it compared to the fakes made from banana leaves.

The third day we flew to Aswan via Cairo. This could not be helped. If you like the desert you can travel by taxi, bus or train but none are recommended. The flight over the dam was magnificent just for the sheer size of the lake. The Lake Nasser ends in Sudan. We stayed at the Pyramis Isis Island Resort and Spa as the Old Cataract Hotel (Agatha Christie fame) was being renovated. The Pyramis was very large



Avenue of Sphinxes, Luxor Temple

The East bank was another story with Temples of gigantic dimension. Temple of Karnak, including the Amun Temple enclosure, was

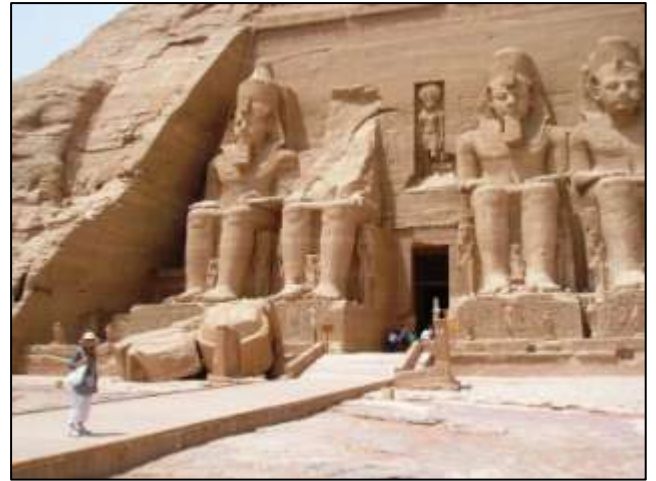
and has seen better days. The Nile cruisers have killed the hotels. Service at both the Sheraton and this hotel was poor and restaurants nothing to write about.

A longer day trip was required to visit the Aswan dam, Temple of Isis, the unfinished Obelisk (1168 tonnes) and Temple of Khnum. A private driver and guide is essential if you want to get out of the heat and not follow a slow moving guide with a flag and 60 bored hangers on. I find that you do get overloaded with facts and figures and in the end you really don't know much more. The guides were very well qualified and eager to let you know how much they had learnt at university, but in the end you really just want to sit down with a cold drink. Oh yes, see the quarry first as visiting the obelisk at midday was not fun due to the extreme heat. Two nights or one full day is plenty for Aswan.



The temple of Isis at Philae

The next day we organized a flight to Abu Simbel. Don't miss this part of Egypt. Not only was the reconstructed Great Temple of Ramses11 (I believe the most powerful pharaoh) magnificent but the construction that took place to move it 20 meters so it would not be lost to the dam was worthwhile seeing. Egypt air waits for you. We had three hours to visit the temple. Once again just take a taxi and if you find a pleasant guide it is worth it. Better than sitting on the bus.



Great Temple of Rameses 11, Abu Simbel

That evening we flew into Cairo, and stayed at Radisson Blue at the airport. The next day we hired a taxi driver who remained with us and drove us to the Pyramids of Giza and the Egyptian Museum. You have to visit them both but don't get a guide unless you wish to listen for hours about Egyptian legends that you can do in the comfort of your home.



Pyramids of Giza

The Tutankhamen Galleries are a must. The museum will be moved to new premises and the exhibits are in a little mess and there are many obstacles so try to wait a year or two. I am a spur of the moment traveller and only book accommodation a day ahead. I would not advise this when going to Egypt.



Book your airline tickets early. The Cairo Doha flight was full and I had trouble getting a seat as it was one of the last days of the Eid holiday. I know that travelling the Nile by boat would also be a journey worth taking but a little more time would be needed. I do like getting out and exploring the streets and would not like being locked up all day on a boat. I did go on board the Movenpick Nile liner and it was impressive.

Take my advice, visit Egypt, you will enjoy the experience.

Roeland Weisfelt.

Statue of rameses 11, Luxor Temple

**Our Trip to Syria
21 May to 4 June 2010
David and Batula Boggs**

Our overall impression was extremely positive. We got a Europcar rental and drove 2600 km, as shown on the route map. The driving was really no problem, except in cities where everyone tries to squeeze into small spaces. You need nerves, persistence, and patience to drive, but nobody wants to have an accident. If you can drive in Doha, you could drive in Syria.



Palmyra (Tadmor)

<http://www.cometosyria.com/en/pages/Palmyra+syria/46/41/print>

There is not much traffic on open roads. The best places are the ones shown on our presentation. If pressed for time, you could omit Bosra, Latakia, and Deir-al-Zuhr. The book,

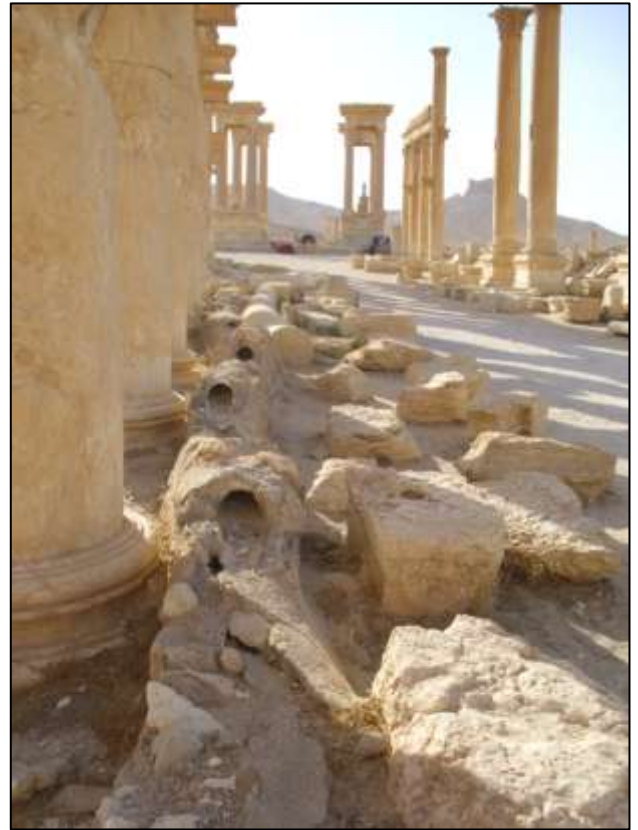
Syria: A Historical and Architectural Guide by Warwick Ball (1994, Melisende Publishing ISBN 190176446X) is a good source, as is ***Lonely Planet Guide to Syria***. Brandte Guide is also good. There were no difficulties, but the guides warn about hustlers in some big tourism hot spots. People are very friendly and hospitable. One man driving his pickup truck asked us to lunch at his home when we flagged him down for directions (going in the opposite direction) on the road from Damascus to Bosra.

Good, clean accommodation was from \$25 to \$100 with breakfast. Our Syria vacation was 20% cheaper than Turkey or Morocco.



Noria (Water wheel) of Hama.

<http://www.cometosyria.com/en/pages/Hama+syria/44/41/print>



Terra Cotta water pipes in Palmyra.

<http://www.cometosyria.com/en/pages/Palmyra+syria/46/41/print>



Bosra Amphitheater.

<http://www.cometosyria.com/en/pages/Krak+des+Chevaliers+syria/49/41/print>

The links given under each photo take you to the 'Come to Syria' Tourist information website where further information can be found on these and many other historic sites in Syria. A link to David & Batula's report of their trip will be published on the QNHG website.



Karak de Chevalier (Qalat al Hosn)

<http://www.cometosyria.com/en/pages/Krak+des+Chevaliers+syria/49/41/print>

QATAR ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NEWS



Earlier this year in **May** our guest speaker was **Dr. Andrew Petersen**, Director of Research in Islamic Archaeology at the University of Wales Lampeter. He has for the last two years been working on the archaeology of coastal settlement in northern Qatar in collaboration with the Qatar Museums Authority and the Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage project.

The following link www.bbc.co.uk/news/11032699 will take you to a short film and interview which he gave to the BBC where he discusses the results of the intensive season of fieldwork at the Islamic site of Rubaigha located on the western side of the Ras al-Shairig peninsula, south of Zubara on the NW coast of Qatar. The team hopes to return to continue their work at the forgotten settlement later this year. They had been asked to investigate the site because of plans to build a bridge between Qatar and Bahrain. During their excavations a number of buildings were discovered including a fort, mosque and large courtyard houses.

THE DHOW - MASTERY OF THE MONSOON

The Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies is hosting a major exhibition on dhows and the people who built and worked on them at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, Thursday 16 September – Friday 17 December (closed at weekends)
Please visit: www.exeter.ac.uk/projects/mares/dhowExhibition for more details.

The maritime traditions of people living and travelling on the major sea routes of the western Indian Ocean are being explored in a UK exhibition at the University of Exeter. The '*The Dhow Mastery of the Monsoon*' exhibition was opened by Professor Ali al-Ghabban, Vice President for Antiquities and Museums of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.

In the past wooden boats particular to the Red Sea, Arabian-Persian Gulf and western Indian Ocean played a significant role along its busy waterways. The boats are known in English as dhows, though it is not a term used by the people of the region. Dhows carried people as passengers, slaves and pilgrims as well as transporting cargoes, from timber and goats to pepper and incense. They were used in fishing the Ocean's rich waters, and in diving for its legendary pearls.

These distinctive and graceful boats are the focus of the exhibition and an academic conference which takes place at the same time. This is the first time that an exhibition dedicated to the history and significance of the dhow has been held in the United Kingdom. It brings together a wealth of material culture and images relating to dhows and the dhow trade, including full size vessels, as well as a range of hitherto unseen dhow models, photographs and artefacts related to dhow construction and life aboard.

Soaring over the exhibition are four model dhows suspended from the ceiling in all their majestic





glory. Two full size dhows, originally part of the now closed Exeter Maritime Museum are based in Eyemouth, will form the centrepiece of the exhibit. This is apt because dhows still form an intrinsic part of Middle Eastern identity and cultural heritage, where the dhow is used on stamps, coins and government crests.



The design of the boats is not merely functional, it also tells much about the identity of the people who built, own and sail in them, according to researcher Dr John Cooper. He is part of the Maritime Culture of Arabian –Persian Gulf and Red Sea Project at the University of Exeter involved in a three year research programme, funded by the Golden Web Foundation to investigate the maritime past of the region. Dr Cooper said ‘Dhows remind us of how people even in the very recent past have lived within the great cycles of nature. Navigators had to know their environment inside out. It wasn't just a case of knowing the seasonal wind patterns, they read the stars, the behaviour of animals at sea, wave patterns, the shapes of headlands and mountains, all to find their way from place to place. There was no Sat Nav for them.

He added, ‘And it's not just the navigators who had this phenomenal technical ability. The builders, even of the biggest and most complex dhows, built these vessels without relying on a single drawing. Their mental agility and planning skills were phenomenal.’

Ibn Majid was one such dhow captain, a famous navigator in the 15th century whose incredible knowledge was translated onto the page when he wrote a guide explaining how to navigate the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean, when best to depart and invaluable information.

The exhibition includes models of dhows based on field drawings done by the University of Exeter MARES team in Yemen and Djibouti. There are over 20 model dhows in the exhibition, from all over the region. The measurements and discussions with traditional boat builders and fishermen were gleaned during field trips to the region. This type of documentation forms a major part of the research project as many of the skills for building and sailing the wooden dhows are dying out as the faster moving fibreglass boats take over from their wooden relatives.



The MARES Project is building on Professor Dionisius Agius's previous ethnographic work in the Arabian-Persian Gulf and Oman. His research focused on the history and origin of traditional wooden vessels and their construction, the crew, folklore history, resources as well as trade in the Western Indian Ocean.

The University of Exeter hosted a four day conference ‘**Red Sea V- Navigated Spaces, Connected Places**’ led by Professor Agius from the University's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. It attracted international expertise from universities around the world involved in this specialised area of maritime research. The keynote speeches included talks on the reconstruction of a Pharaonic boat and the experiment of sailing with this boat along the Red Sea. It also highlighted an experiment of

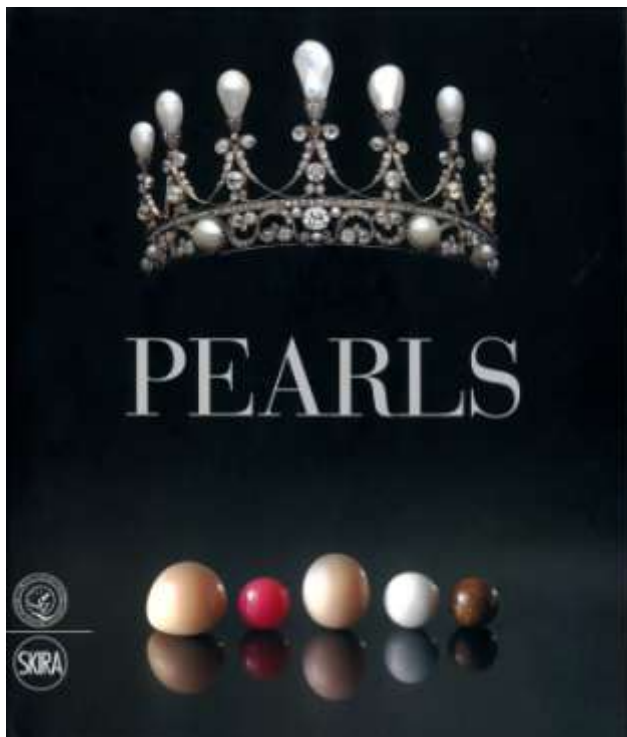
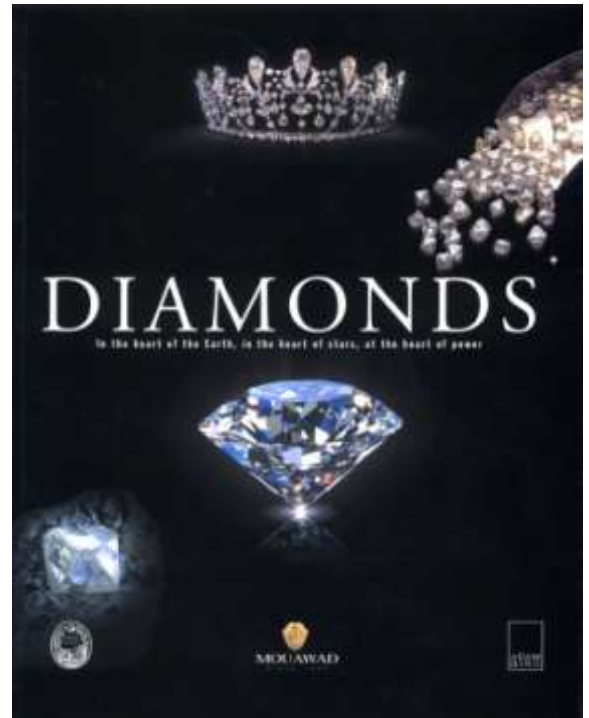
reconstruction and navigation of a 9th century Indian Ocean ship and the academic's direct experience and souvenirs on the pre-independence dhow-trade business in Aden.

Many thanks to Esther White, Press Office University of Exeter for the above information

QNHG LIBRARY NEWS

Qatar Natural History Group has its own library covering a wide range of natural history subjects focussing on the Arabian Gulf - especially Qatar. Recent additions to the library include:

DIAMONDS: The book *Diamonds* was published in 2001 by Paris Natural History Museum to coincide with a special exhibition featuring a large collection of unique and exquisite diamonds. It covers the creation, history and cutting of this 'ladies best friend'. The book features some magnificent jewellery pieces and some record size diamonds. Did you know that diamonds come in a multitude of colours including pink, blue, orange, green and even black? Read this book and you will find there is more to diamonds than meets the eye!



PEARLS: For those QNHG members who visited the *Pearls* special exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art from January to June 2010, this book is an excellent reminder of that world-class exhibition. For those who missed the exhibition, this book will also be extremely interesting. Did you know that any shell can produce a pearl: from giant clams to conch shells? Some of these are extremely rare and beautiful: there are only five pearls that have ever been found from the Nautilus shell, and the Qatar Museums Authority is fortunate to own two of them.

This book also shows a selection of magnificent natural pearls kindly loaned for the exhibition by the Alfaridan and Al-Majed families. This book covers the formation of pearls (proving pearls are not formed over a grain of sand), the various types of pearls, history of pearls, pearl fishing (especially in the gulf), the creation of cultured pearls in Japan, modern pearl farming and pearl jewellery. It is a beautiful book and an absolutely authoritative work on this subject.

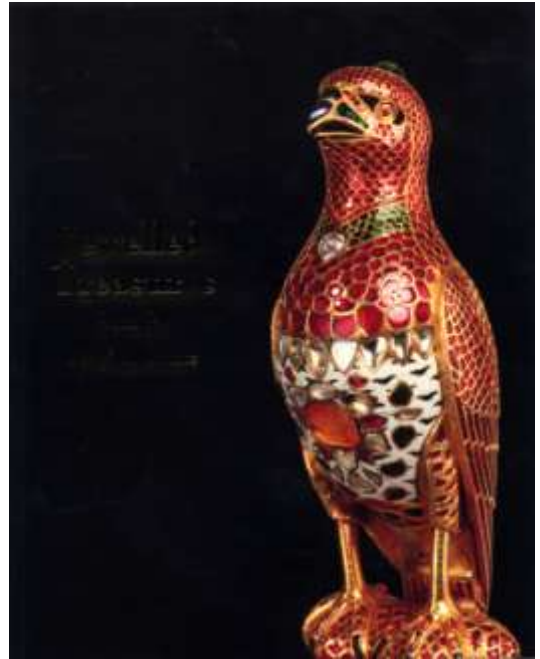
JEWELLED TREASURES FROM THE MUGHUL COURTS: The unique treasures shown in this book now form part of the collection of Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art. This book was published in March 2002 to coincide with a public display of these articles, which were being collected for the planned museum.

QNHG would like to thank Qatar Museums Authority, in particular Dr Oliver Watson (Director of the Museum of Islamic Art), for the kind donation of the books *Pearls* and *Jewelled Treasures from the Mughal Courts*. We would also like to thank Hubert Bari (former curator of the Pearls special exhibition at the Museum of Islamic Art and former exhibition commissioner at Paris Natural History Museum) for the kind donation of the book *Diamonds*.

A full inventory of all books and publications held in the library, some 200+ items, is available on the QNHG website and may be found by using the following link www.qnhg.org/library/inventory. Many thanks to all those people and organisations for their generous donations to our library, if you are leaving Qatar and would like to make a donation please contact Mark Murase or any other committee member.

All publications are gratefully received!

Mark Murase
QNHG Librarian
librarian@qnhg.org



NEW SPECIES OF DRAGONFLY RECORDED IN QATAR



Wandering Glider *Pantala flavescens*



QNHG received exciting news from Michael Grunwell this summer with confirmation of a new Dragonfly species for Qatar. The new species, **Wandering Glider *Pantala flavescens***, was photographed by Michael for the first time at Al Khor in early September.

Michael writes: "I had seen several of this species at Dhakira in March 2010 but I failed to get a photograph at the time. On my return to Qatar after my summer break I became aware of large numbers of medium sized dragonflies constantly patrolling beaches and compound walls. They were noticeable for their constant movements, back and forth, hardly ever resting. On this occasion I saw one perched and I was able to approach close enough to get the photograph above. The broad hind wing and the venation in the wings are diagnostic for this species. The length of the tail appendages shows this insect to be a male. Some males in Arabia can be very bright reddish-orange on the thorax, much brighter than the one shown here. I have been told that at the end of August they were very common around the coasts and this is probably part of a large influx into Qatar. I now think it probable that this species visits Qatar every year but is over looked because it is really seen settled. It is arguable that this species is the most successful and widespread in the world as it has an almost worldwide distribution. In addition, it can complete its lifecycle in only one month. This species brings the official total of Damselflies and Dragonflies in the state of Qatar to twelve. Interestingly, as I write, during the 4th week of September, I have seen none of these for the last week but it is apparent that there is currently another influx of a larger species, *Anax parthenope* - the Lesser Emperor. This is a big dragonfly which often appears blue-bodied in flight".

Readers of Michael's article in the March 2010 QNHG newsletter might recall that he predicted that this species would be present in Qatar but had, at that time, yet to record it. Click on the link to see Michael's article in full <http://www.qnhg.org/archive/publications> .

WHICH FISH?

In the UAE, fish stocks are thought to have declined by as much as 80% over the last 30 years. Presumably levels are similar in the waters off Qatar. Below is a link to a simple printable guide produced in the UAE to take with you when you are shopping for fish, showing which species are seriously endangered by overfishing, which are currently being fished at sustainable levels and which are still plentiful.

<http://www.choosewisely.ae/page/how-can-i-help>

RUEPPELL'S SAND FOX – OR ARABIAN RED FOX?

QNHG and Qatar Bird Club member Dileep Kumar took a superb photo of a Fox, *Vulpes spp*, (published on the front cover of this newsletter) while out birding at Arakhiya Farm on 5 May, a few days after the last Newsletter was issued. This was one of three foxes, running away from one of the pivot fields towards the desert.

The particular species has not as yet been confirmed, but there is speculation that it might be either a young Red Fox or a Rueppell's Sand Fox. If it is the later then it is a rare photo indeed. These tiny animals – adults weigh only 1.5 kilos – are rarely seen, being almost always nocturnal. They avoid the territory of the much commoner and larger Red Fox which would regard them as prey, and for that reason have been 'pushed' into living in the desert rather than in the rocky, hilly areas in central Qatar where Red Foxes are common. Either way, the photo is a remarkable achievement for Dileep and a splendid addition to his portfolio of Qatar wildlife. Look out for other photos from Dileep in the Birding News section of this newsletter.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

QATAR GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Qatar Geological Society has a new website. Visit www.site.qatargeolsoc.com/QatarGeolSoc.html to see information about the schedule of meetings, speakers and fieldtrips.

BIRDING NEWS FROM THE QATAR BIRD CLUB

During the summer Qatar recorded successful breeding of several species of heron – Night Heron, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and Little Bittern. These were all recorded at the Abu Nakhla wastewater lagoons which are one of the most important sites for bird life in Qatar.



The Autumn migration started early and by mid August many migrants from Europe could be found including: Hoopoe, European Roller, Yellow Wagtail and Isabelline Wheatear. Along the coasts there were impressive numbers of waders including Curlew, Whimbrel, Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper etc.

By the end of August two middle eastern specialities - Cream Coloured Coursers and Crab Plovers were present along the north and east coasts. Board-billed Sandpipers passed though in good numbers in early September.

Cream Coloured Courser family

Through September the number of familiar European migrants continued to build with Pied Wheatear, Swallow, Whitethroat, Grey shrike, Turtle dove and Blue cheeked Bee-eaters all in evidence. By mid September birds of prey were also in evidence with Marsh and Pallid Harriers seen over the pivot fields. Many of these birds of prey can be expected to remain in Qatar all winter.



Marsh Harrier



Red-rumped Swallows

Brian Hunter

Photograph of Cream Coloured Coursers by Dileep Kumar

Photographs of Red-rumped Swallows & Marsh Harrier by John Thompson

QATAR BIRD CLUB AGM

The Qatar Bird Club has recently published the second issue of the QBC Newsletter. Visit the QBC page on the QNHG website to download your own copy www.qnhg.org/qbc . The next issue will be out shortly and the launch of the QBC website should also take place in the near future. Meanwhile, please see the notice below for details of the forthcoming QBC AGM. All will be welcome.

QBC Annual General Meeting

Dear QBC Members,

After completing a 2 year term in office, the Executive committee of the QBC will convene a General Meeting to be attended by all members on **Sunday December 5, 2010 at FEC at 7:30 p.m.**

The Agenda will be as follows:

1. Annual (end of term) Report (Technical & Administrative)
2. Bylaws & Regulations
3. Budget Report
4. Election of a new Committee for 2011/2012

You are all cordially invited to attend this very important meeting.

**ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA**

The *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* compiled by Mike Jennings was published in the middle of **July 2010, as Volume 25 of Fauna of Arabia**. This journal is a joint publication of the Senckenberg Institute Frankfurt a.m. and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, Riyadh. In its 770 or so pages it covers the 273 breeding birds of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra (including 23 endemics) with notes on 24 other species that may breed. Breeding birds are mapped and illustrated. There are over 100 colour photos of birds and habitats etc and numerous other general maps.

It is a hardback produced to a high standard, in A4 format and printed in Germany. Because of the relatively short print run there are likely to be limited opportunities to obtain a copy of the atlas. Anyone wanting to buy a copy can obtain one as follows:

1. It is currently available from the Swiss distributors:

Andrea Murdoch (Ms)
Karger Libri
International Subscription Agency Ltd
Journals Administration & Book Series
Petersgraben 31, 4009 Basle.
phone: +41 61 306 15 23
fax: +41 61 306 15 67

Delivery will be made on prepayment. Orders can be made by email, fax or mail. Alternatively customers can use the electronic order form on their website (http://www.libri.ch/App_Web/DE/services/faunaofarabia.aspx#03). Major credit cards such as VISA and MasterCard are accepted.

The price is SF 169 this is roughly equivalent to £103, Euro 122 or US \$ 163), plus postage (approx. SF 35 on international orders). Karger Libri has a general website at <http://www.libri.ch/Default.aspx>

The distributors have offered free postage on orders of 5 or more at one time.

2. It is also currently offered by the Natural History Book Service (www.nhbs.com) at £149 plus postage.

Buyers should be aware that the atlas contains a few photos that are printed too dark, so they may wish to see a copy before committing to the full price. Also it is possible that there may be a cheaper commercial version printed later. However there are as yet no definite plans to do this and no offers from commercial publishers to do it.

Mike will be happy to answer any questions about the book or the ABBA project before you purchase ArabianBirds@dsl.pipex.com.

For anyone interested in ordering the Atlas who would like to see a copy, Fran Gillespie has the only copy in Qatar and she'll make it available for inspection at her book table at the meeting **on Wednesday October 6th** and at the next meeting of the Qatar Bird Club. If you cannot make these meetings and still wish to see it, email Fran on gillespi@qatar.net.qa and arrange to call by her villa.

COMMON BIRDS OF QATAR



Coming soon... the first field guide to the birds of Qatar.

Common Birds of Qatar, by Hanne and Jens Eriksen and Frances Gillespie, contains over 400 superb photographs by the Eriksens, authors of many books on birds of the region and among the best-known wildlife photographers in the Middle East. Details of 215 species are included, and each page features not only at least one photograph but also a chart showing the time of year when each species is most likely to be seen, plus a distribution map suggesting possible locations within Qatar where particular birds may be observed..

The publication of this long-awaited guide is sponsored by Maersk Oil Qatar and will be priced at QR 120.

LECTURE PROGRAMME

Please note new meeting time of 7:00 pm. All will be welcome, please feel free to bring along friends and guests to the presentation.

Please note that the dates for presentations for the next three months will be:

Oct 6th & Nov 3rd & Dec 1st.

In **Oct** our guest speaker will be **Dr. Nobuyuki Yamaguchi**, of the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences at Qatar University. The title of his presentation to the QNHG will be: **The Life of the Desert Hedgehog *Paraechinus aethiopicus*.**

Dr. Yamaguchi studied endocrinology, using the Japanese quail, for his MSc at Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. He then moved to the University of Oxford, UK to study animal ecology/behaviour for his DPhil, where he stayed for nearly 15 years. For his doctorate he studied free-ranging feral American mink in the Upper Thames in Oxfordshire, UK.

His current research interests include the following subjects.

- Evolution and conservation of large cats, especially lions and tigers

- Cryptic tactics and sexual conflict in the evolution of mammalian reproductive strategies
- Bringing more science into nature conservation
- Biodiversity of Qatar



Dr. Nobuyuki Yamaguchi

Since arriving in Doha in 2007 he and his students have been studying how hedgehogs live in Qatar. At that time, little was known about their habits, including simple things such as whether they hibernate in Qatar or not. He and his first student, Hind Al Musfir, found that hedgehogs do hibernate in Qatar during the



coldest part of the year, usually between January and February. Observations also suggested that the breeding season probably starts immediately after they come out of hibernation. Current research students, Hayat Al Jabiry and Afra Al Hajiri, have been working with Dr. Yamaguchi with hedgehogs in the field using radio-tracking techniques, to collect data to further understand their basic ecology. This work is the first research of this type on hedgehogs in a GCC country, and also the first ever research on a terrestrial mammal species in Qatar using radio-tracking. The study is being conducted at the Qatar University Farm in the north of the peninsula.

On **Nov 3rd** our guest speaker will be **Michael Grunwell**, member of QBC and QNHG and a senior science teacher at Al Khor International School. The title of his presentation to the QNHG will be: **Dragonflies and Damselflies of Qatar**.

Michael qualified with a degree in Zoology from the University of Wales in 1983 before working for British Airways until 1993. He then moved to the airline telecommunication cooperative called SITA. In 1998 he qualified as a Chartered Management accountant and in 2000 became a self employed IT consultant dealing with OLAP packages. Since 2001, after retraining as a teacher, he has held various posts including head of IT at the British International School, Istanbul. He has just begun his fourth year of teaching at Al Khor International School where he is an all round teacher of science. He has recently moved away from Biology at advanced level and is now teaching Physics A level.

Michael has always been a keen birdwatcher commenting that 'from the mid 1980's to 2000, when I retired from the frontline twitching scene, I was an obsessive twitcher. I have been privileged to birdwatch in many countries around the world and have seen over 3000 species worldwide. I am now a very relaxed birdwatcher who enjoys finding birds in Qatar.' He is currently vice chair of the QBC records committee and is responsible for the maintenance of the Qatar bird list.

When asked about his interest in Odonata species Michael said, 'I have been interested in dragonflies since the early 1980's though because of the lack of literature I always tended to ignore them when encountered outside the

UK. In the last few years I have become interested in macro photography and have used photography to help me study these insects'. Michael published a definitive article on the current status of Odonata in the State of Qatar in the March 2009 QNHG newsletter.



Michael Grunwell & Jens Eriksen, April 2009

In **Dec** our guest speaker will be **Prof. Dionisius Agius from the University of Exeter**. The title of his presentation to the QNHG will be: **The Test of Time: Classic Ships of Islam**.

Professor Agius is best known for his work on Islamic material culture, maritime ethnography and Arabic language and linguistics. He is particularly interested in the history and provenance of traditional wooden vessels and their construction, the crew, folklore history, resources and trade in the Western Indian Ocean.

In the past he has conducted ethnographical fieldwork among seafaring communities on the coasts of the Arabian Gulf States and the Dhofar region of Oman as part of a Leverhulme Research Fellowship (1996 to 1998). Similar fieldwork has been conducted on the Egyptian and Sudanese Red Sea littoral (2001-2004) and the Saudi coast (2007). As principal investigator of an Arts & Humanities Research Council project (2002-2005) he led a team working on paper fragments and coinage (12th-15th c) at Quseir al-Qadim on the Egyptian Red Sea coast. He has also researched on the Arabic of Islamic Sicily and Malta and varied topics in Arabic linguistics. He is general editor and



founder of *Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* (est. 1988).

He presently holds a major grant (2008-2011) funded by the Golden Web Foundation for a project entitled MARES: Maritime Ethnography of the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea: People, Trade and Pilgrimage and is the Director and

Principal Investigator of the project. www.ex.ac.uk/mares.

Details of speakers scheduled for January through to the end of June 2011 will be posted on the QNHG website in due course and in the next issue of the newsletter.

RAMBLE / FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME

QNHG – Rambles & Field Trips October Schedule 2010

Nature, People, Culture ~ motto of the Qatar Natural History Group

Hello and welcome back to a new season of ambling and rambling!

I hope you have had a wonderful hot season and are ready and raring to go on some adventures to new places, as well as revisits to some old. There will be some change in the program this season, namely a reduction to an average of two trips per month, but just like the environments we so love to experience, we are also constantly dealing with transitions and change.

Another change to address is one longer in coming, that is, the make up of our group. Just over 30 years ago, the QNHG was founded by a relatively small group of mostly British and Dutch engineers, people who not only studied the environment in depth, but who spent a great deal of time living in it, camping, exploring and doing their jobs. They knew their adopted landscape and seas intimately and worked to preserve them while they interacted with them, learning from and about the local peoples and cultures.

In the last few years, however, the demographics of our group have shifted - in what I believe is a positive direction. We have become both larger and more diversified in our membership, but the backgrounds of our members now do not necessarily include the close relationship with the natural world as did our founders. The experience of many a new member is more urban than rural, more city street than country road. What this means for us as an environmentally conscious group is that we have to revisit our origins, educate our members, and openly discuss a simple question: Who are we?

A number of spontaneous conversations have arisen regarding this topic so I have given it a great deal of thought; it has come to mind that we are more of a 'geographic society' in many ways than a simple 'natural history group'. Not only are we concerned with the natural environment, but we are also concerned about humanity's place in that environment, about how the local cultures have and still do interact with the natural world. Hence, our group visits museums such as Sheikh Faisal's Farm and sites of historical significance, such as the Qal'at Ruwayda or Zubara City. However, while this shows others what we do, on a fundamental level this still hasn't answered the question of who we are, about the basic principles underlying our actions.

Here are some that come to mind.

First, we are stewards of our environment, outdoors leaders who lead by example. As we explore, we leave places better than we found them. That may mean picking up trash as during rambles to the inter-tidal/sabkha zones down south in Mesaieed, or up north around Al Mufjar village. We do not, however, pick up anything at archaeological sites unless invited to do so; both history and nature belong to all, so they're not ours to destroy.

Second, we treat all plants and animals with respect - whether domestic or wild. This means we don't do anything to cause undue stress or permanent damage to the flora and fauna we may encounter - or may



encounter us. Although some less than expected behaviours may occur accidentally, we are constantly striving to live up to this ideal.

In addition, we pool our knowledge in the QNHG to share and deepen each other's insights. On our trips there is often someone, usually just a fellow participant, available to answer your question, or otherwise to join you in query. This group was organized by people like us who strove to let their curiosity get the better of them, to find out what was over that ridge or what that unexpected thing was before their eyes. We may be of different backgrounds than our Dutch and British forbears, but we are their intellectual heirs. Like them, we are life-long, collaborative learners. We are constantly doing our best to dispel our own ignorance through interactions with similarly inquisitive people from all over the planet, building communication, sharing our learnings and strengthening our individual as well as collective understandings.



Please think on these principles as we wander about on our trips, and share your thoughts. What other principles do we embody? Let me know your own personal response to the question, "What is the QNHG?"

John D. Tribuna
Rambles & Field Trips Coordinator
QNHG

Saturday, October 30: Field Trip - Birding Dhow Trip with Michael Grunwell of the Qatar Bird Club (QBC)

In a repeat of last year's season kick-off, we will be repeating our Qatari pelagic (sea dwelling) birding trip, making it the second annual! Due to logistical reasons, however, we will be doing this on the last weekend of the month, and we will only be able to rent dhow from Qatar International Adventures (QIA). We will have a signup sheet, and it will be first come, first served for registered members – that means you have to sign up for a membership card **before** you can go on the list! If you want to go on this trip, text John Tribuna at 605.6762 with your name and the number of members in your group.

IMPORTANT: Even if you have already signed up for this trip, you must text a message to 605.6762 which includes the NAME and NATIONALITY of people you signed up. Since our trip is a bit unusual in that we are heading far offshore, we are required to provide a list of passengers - along with their nationality - to the Coast Guard three days before departure. Make sure you bring your Qatar ID with you in case we are boarded at sea for a Coast Guard inspection.

Special Note: Due to the length of this trip, the unprotected nature of these boats on the open sea (i.e., no cabins, open rails, etc.), and the dhows' sparse furnishing, we strongly discourage young children, especially under 12 years of age. If you have any questions about the appropriateness of this trip for your child, contact John Tribuna to discuss your concerns.

As mentioned earlier, our goal, **Plan A** is to get out away from the coast, 12.5 miles (20 km), so we can see birds that are not usually available along the coast. As we are dealing with the fickle sea, however, and we are going out into international waters, the Coast Guard can call off our deep water trip due to weather conditions or other concerns at any time. If the dhow has not yet left the dock when the Coast Guard makes this announcement, we will reschedule our trip with QIA for the next available weekend. If, however, the Coast Guard makes its announcement after we have already left the docks, or if we get out to sea and discover the conditions are too rough, etc., we will fall back to **Plan B**, which is to go to Al Safliya Island. We should be able to go swimming there and generally enjoy a day at the beach; some



bird sighting will still be possible, actually expected, so either way we will be birding. Therefore, remember if you need to cancel your participation in this trip for any reason, you must do so before 9am on Monday, October 25. Fees paid will not be refundable after that time.

If you wish to do a little research in preparation for our trip, at the top of our 'to see' list is the Persian Shearwater - they must be out there and we hope to make history by a confirmed sighting of one! No one really knows which birds congregate off the coast here, so almost everything we see will be a discovery. Birds which we should certainly see are the Socotra cormorant, Slender-billed gull, the Little tern, Gull-billed tern, Sandwich - and Lesser crested terns. Birds we are hoping for include: the Greater crested tern, Red-necked phalarope, a range of waders and hopefully Skua species. Another bird which it is possible though unlikely to sight is the Red billed tropicbird. In the evening during our dusk return trip, we can keep our eyes out for both White-faced and Wilson's Storm Petrels. For any questions of an avian nature, please contact Michael Grunwell of the QBC at 5584.9161. Michael specializes in pelagic birding; a number of experienced QBC bird watchers will be on the dhow to help us spot our 'quarry'.

Restrictions: Numbers are limited - sign up for the trip with organizer; No pets; Not recommended for children under 12

Date: Saturday, October 30

Time: The dhow departs at 12:00 noon and is expected to return around 6:00 PM

Rendezvous: Meet at the Qatar International Adventures (QIA) pier at 11:30 AM

Directions: On the Corniche, go to the Roundabout with the large pearl oyster monument near the Islamic Museum. Turn towards the water and go out onto the jetty. The QIA pier is the first one on the left as you drive out onto the jetty; they are the first boats you see from the corniche on the left and they have "QIA" or "QIT" written high up on their white bows. Park as close to the boats as possible.

Price per Passenger: 100 QR

Organizer(s): QNHG John Tribuna, 6605.6762

Pack your swimming & sun gear - just in case! Other things you need to bring: binoculars and bird books, a light jacket or layer since it will cool down during the last hour of our trip into port - it'll be dark, so we can enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and Doha City at night! Music - if you wish to play some of your music during the sunset cruise segment, make sure you bring a USB adapter to plug into the boats' sound systems. Also, if you are vulnerable to seasickness, bring and take your medications appropriately. Although water and soft drinks will be provided, you need to bring enough food and favourite drinks to last six hours. QIA reminder that insurance doesn't cover alcohol related accidents.

QATAR MUSEUMS AUTHORITY

Dates for your diary!

'A Journey into the World of the Ottomans'

Exhibition October 29th to January 24th; Conference November 28th & 29th 2010.

Visit the MIA website for further information.

Magnum Exhibition: In Our Time – an exhibition of photographs – The World as seen by Magnum photographers 1936-1987; September 21st - October 30th, 2010

QMA Gallery

No. 10, Cultural Village West Bay, Doha, Qatar

Ph: 4422 4805 or 4422 2010

Email: magnum@qma.org.qa

Exhibition hours

Saturday to Thursday 11:00am to 9:00pm

Friday 2:00pm to 9:00pm



QAWS

For information about the Qatar Animal Welfare Society please visit their website www.qaws.org or contact them via contact@qaws.org. Volunteers are always welcome volunteers@qaws.org.

TUESDAY LADIES GROUP – NEW SEASON

The new season has started at TLG. All ladies are welcome to join us at the Ramada Hotel for an informal breakfast followed by a presentation. Meetings held bimonthly on alternate Tuesdays throughout the year, 9.00 for a 10am start, visitors welcome. For further information contact us by email: tlgdoha@gmail.com or visit our website – www.tlgdoha.com. Membership renewals are now due but you may also join us as a guest.

QNHG MEMBERSHIP

QNHG Membership Guidelines

- Our new season starts in the month of October every year.
- Membership to the Qatar Natural History Group is to be renewed on a yearly basis.
- A membership period coincides with our season (October to September of the next year).
- Membership applications are accepted throughout the year. Memberships always expire on September 30th of each year.
- There are two types of memberships with the following membership fees (effective October 2009):
 - Single Membership (QR.50/year)
 - Family Membership (QR.100/year)

Members from last season **do not** need to repeat the online registration process – simply pay your 2010/11 fees at the next meeting or event. Fees for the 2010/2011 season will remain at the same rate as last year: 50QR for individual membership and 100QR for a couple or family.

QNHG Membership Application Process for NEW members

1. Applicant submits membership request using the [online application form](#)
2. Applicant receives an email confirming the successful submission of the membership application.
3. The applicant's membership to QNHG remains blocked until membership fees are received.
4. Membership fees may be paid at any QNHG event: general meeting; ramble or special event.
5. Once the membership fees have been received, the applicant's membership is changed to active and access to all web site functions is enabled. The applicant will receive QNHG emails from this time.

2009/10 COMMITTEE MEMBERS



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