



Qatar Natural History Group

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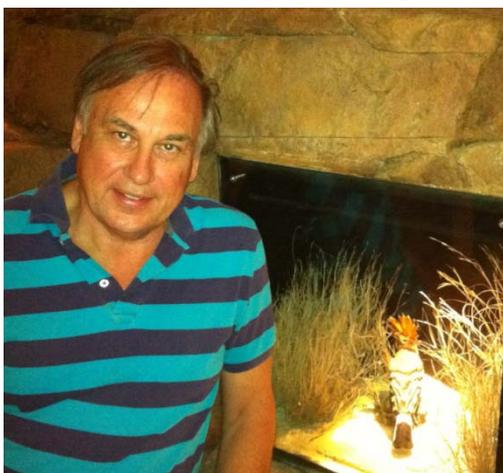
December 2012



Inside This Issue

2	Chairman's Message	5	Speaker Profiles	9	Author's Corner
3	Newsletter Editor's Message	6	Report: October Talk	10	Rambles (Continued)
3	QNHG News	7	Report: November Talk	11	Other Events
4	Upcoming Events and Talks	8	Rambles	11	Steering Committee

Chairman's Message



I would like to welcome everyone to our new QNHG 2012-2013 season - and especially new members. In this new season, we plan to continue to provide members with informative talks and exciting field trips and rambles. This month sees in the thirty-fourth anniversary of the QNHG.

We have had a lively start to the new season with a wide variety of subjects in the monthly talks, rambles and field trips. Details are in this newsletter. In October, Michael Grunwell provided an enlightening overview of dragonflies and damselflies found in Qatar. In November, Professor Moain Sadeq of Qatar University provided a fascinating introduction to art and architecture in transition from the Pre-Islamic to Islamic period.

During October, we were grateful to have Richard Cuttler, Senior Research Fellow in Archeology at the University of Birmingham, join us on our excursion to Jazirat Bin Ghannam ("Purple Island") and enlighten us with his extensive knowledge of the island's history and of his own archeological work on the island in 2000. During November, we had an overnight astronomy and star gazing excursion to the desert. Also in November, we also held a reconnaissance joint field excursion with the Qatar Geological Society (QGS) to Umm Tays Preserve in the north of Qatar. This Umm Tays trip will be offered to QNHG members in early 2013.

For the **Wednesday 5th December 2012 talk**, we are delighted to announce that **Dr. Christian Strohmer of ExxonMobil Research Qatar** will provide a presentation about the famous Abu Dhabi Sabkha. We shall learn about sea-level changes in the Arabian Gulf, about stromatolites in Qatar and the Gulf, of gypsum and anhydrite growths and the discovery of a whale that lived in the Gulf 5,000 years ago in the Holocene period.

I would like to thank everyone who supported the QNHG during the 2011-2012 season.

In particular, I would like to mention the contributions of the society's departing executive committee members April Conkey, Adrian Teague, Marilyn Totten, Orlin Lavallie, Patricia Grindley and Shakir Hussain. We thank them all for the time and energy that they put into the QNHG. We wish them well. For a list of the current executive committee members, please see the back page of this newsletter. I strongly urge everyone interested in making a difference to step forward and nominate him/herself for any unfilled position on the QNHG Executive Committee as positions become vacant. Please keep an eye on the website or on last page of the QNHG newsletter for the available positions.

Finally, I wish to encourage everyone to attend our monthly talks, rambles and field trips. As keen natural historians and geologists, it is important that each one of our members share their knowledge and experience by attending the monthly talks and field trips and contributing their opinions to the discussions. We hope that we can all share our experience and knowledge of the local natural history, and of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. So please join us in our QNHG activities and if you wish to help out, please contact a QNHG committee member.

We look forward to seeing you!

Rob Ross
Chairman, QNHG

Editor's Message

Dear Member,

It gives me great pleasure to share this news with you: The first newsletter of the season, 2012-13 is out! I would like to thank the following members for the contributions to this newsletter:

Fran Gillespie, Tammy King, Mihai Gerlach and Abdelys Gonzalez. The issue of this newsletter is available on the web site. The site also hosts the previous issues.

Please send any articles, information or announcements to newsletter-editor@qnhg.org or yathiraigal@gmail.com and put "QNHG Newsletter" in the subject line. Please send photographs separately and make sure to label them. Remember to check the website regularly for updates regarding our monthly talks and rambles.

I look forward to your comments.

A. Balaji

Newsletter Editor, QNHG, 2012-2013

QNHG News

Check the back page of this newsletter for **vacant positions** on the steering committee that we need to fill. If you would like to help out, we would like to hear from you.

Speaker Meetings at DESS in 2013 for your Diary – Wednesdays at 7:00pm

9th January - Steffen Bach - Giants meet in the Gulf : the Whale Shark aggregations in Qatar

6th February - Susan Rees -A Day in the Life of the Conservation Department at the Museum of Islamic Art

QNHG is working on a **new website** that will offer a better user experience. Mihai Gerlach has done an excellent job in keeping our current website up to date. QNHG members may have experienced problems with logging in and these are being resolved by the service provider.

The **QNHG newsletter** has undergone a makeover. Share your feedback about the new look. We welcome your input so please feel free to contribute content.

Tammy King has organized some exciting **rambles** this year, including the upcoming adventure kayaking trips during December. Unfortunately, these trips are now fully booked up.

In November, a joint field trip to **Umm Tays Preserve** was held with the Qatar Geological Society (QGS). This trip will be offered to QNHG members in 2013. This trip depends on low tide being at noon so we will let you know we have arranged the dates. This trip was first run jointly between the QNHG and QGS back in 2009 and we hope to make it an annual event.



Picture shows crossing to the barrier beach at Umm Tays at low tide.

Upcoming QNHG Events

December Lecture

Presentation: The Famous Abu Dhabi Sabkha: Stromatolites, Evaporites and a Whale

Date: 5 December 2012, Doha English Speaking School. See <http://www.qnhg.org/DESS> for map.



Dr. Christian J. Strohmenger

Dr. Christian J. Strohmenger has been with ExxonMobil Research Qatar, Doha, since 2011 as Team Lead and Geological Advisor at the Qatar Center for Coastal Research (QCCR). He received a Diploma in Geology from the University of Giessen (1983) and a PhD in Sedimentology from the University of Heidelberg, Germany (1988). From 1989 to 1990 he worked as a Research Assistant in carbonate sedimentology and sequence stratigraphy at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. He joined BEB Erdgas und Erdoel GmbH, Hanover, Germany (now ExxonMobil Production Germany, EMPG) in 1990 working as a Carbonate Sedimentologist and Seismic Interpreter. From 1996 to 2002 he was with ExxonMobil Exploration Company in Houston, Texas where he worked on Mesozoic and Paleozoic carbonate and sandstone reservoirs of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. He was seconded to Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations (ADCO), United Arab Emirates in 2002 working as a Carbonate Stratigraphy Specialist until 2009. From 2009 to 2010 he worked for ExxonMobil Oil Indonesia, Jakarta as a Carbonate Advisor. His main interests are carbonate sequence stratigraphy, sedimentology, and reservoir quality prediction. Christian is a member of AAPG, SEPM, GSA, IAS, and QGS.

Summary of Presentation:

Lateral and vertical sabkha sequences studied along the Abu Dhabi coastline in the vicinity of Al-Qanatif Island and at Mussafah Industrial Channel are unique modern day geologic examples that add greatly to the interpretation of features observed in core and outcrops deposited many millions of years ago.

The lateral sabkha sequence displays supratidal (upper, middle, and lower sabkha), intertidal (microbial mat) and lowermost intertidal to shallow subtidal (lagoon and tidal-channel) facies belts. Radiocarbon age-dating of ten hardground and three microbial mat samples show an age range from approx. 3,500 years before present (supratidal environment: subsurface hardground) to approx. 900 years before present (intertidal environment: subsurface microbial mat); thereby supporting the seaward progradation of the facies belts since the last Flandrian sea-level highstand. The sabkha sequence at Mussafah Channel formed during the post-glacial Flandrian transgression, resulting in the reworking of Pleistocene aeolian dunes (radiocarbon age approx. 24,000 to 23,000 years before present) and the deposition of intertidal to shallow subtidal Holocene microbial mat, rooted and microbial-laminated lagoon, tidal-channel, tidal-delta, and longshore beach bar and beach spit deposits (approx. 6,600 to 5,000 years before present). Recent find of whale bones within tidal-channel deposits overlying the microbial mat further document the initial Holocene transgression. During a subsequent slight sea-level fall (regression), these carbonates were partly to completely overprinted (replaced) by gypsum and anhydrite.

Significant amounts of dolomite were found within the rooted and microbial-laminated lagoonal carbonates, the subsurface and surface crinkly-laminated microbial mats, some of the tidal-channel deposits, and within some of the Pleistocene carbonate-rich sands. The dolomite is very fine-crystalline and displays spherical morphologies as well as subhedral to euhedral dolomite rhombs. The formation of dolomite is interpreted to be related to dolomite-mediating microbial organisms which form the widespread microbial mat along the Abu Dhabi coastline. Organic molecules like extracellular polymeric substances (EPS) are interpreted to play a key role in dolomite mineralization processes

December Rambles

Kayaking Trip

If you want to lose the Doha stone you have put on the next outing may help! Two adventure kayaking trips through the mangroves is being planned for early Dec. More details to follow soon. Additional fees will be necessary to pay for kayak rentals. This is limited in numbers.

Speaker Profile

October Speaker: Michael Grunwell

Title of Presentation: Dragonflies and Damselflies of Qatar (see Monthly Talk Report on page 6)

Date & Venue: 3 October 2012, Doha English Speaking School

Speaker Bio: Michael Grunwell graduated from Bangor University in Wales in 1983 with a degree in zoology, and worked for British Airways and in IT, before training as a teacher ten years ago. He taught in Istanbul for a year and has taught at Al Khor International School since 2007.

A renowned authority on local bird species, Michael's interest in ornithology goes back to his youth when he spent long summers at Filey on the Yorkshire coast, observing sea birds and migrants. He retired from UK twitching in 2000 and has recently become an avid world bird lister, with trips to Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Tanzania and a projected trip to Uganda. His current world list now stands at 2797 species.

Besides the birds of Qatar, Michael has an interest in dragonflies which dates back to his time at university, and he has seen and photographed all the species on the current Qatar list.



November Speaker: Prof. Moain Sadeq



Prof. Moain Sadeq

Title of Presentation: Architecture and Art in transition: from Pre-Islamic to Islamic periods. (see Monthly Talk Report on Page 7)

Date & Venue: 7 November 2012, Doha English Speaking School

Dr. Moain Sadeq is professor of history and archaeology at Qatar University. He taught previously at the University of Chicago and the University of Toronto. His major interests are in Islamic history and archaeology, art history, history of architecture, urbanism, peoples and cultures of the Middle East, women and gender in Ancient and Muslim Worlds.

Dr. Moain's publications are multi-lingual. He published a book on the Mamluk history and architecture (in German) and a series of papers in English in peer reviewed journals. His most recent publications (in April and May 2012) are "the Mamluk architecture and related arts as evidence of state stability and administration in Egypt and Syria" and "Unpublished Mamluk Blazons and Mottos on Glazed Pottery at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada"

In addition, Dr. Sadeq has excavated in various sites in the Middle East, including archaeological sites in Gaza (1995-2000) and at the sites of Al-Zubarah and Murwab in Qatar between 1980 and 1984. He organized international historical and archaeological exhibits, including one in Qatar National Museum in 1996. He volunteered in awareness programs, producing cultural documentaries and participated actively in bridging cultures and fostering mutual understanding. He is an elected board member of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and member of the American Historical Association.



Monthly Talk Report

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Qatar



Oasis Bluetail damselflies mating

This is an article adapted from Michael Grunwell's talk in QNHG at DESS, reported by Fran Gillespie.

Dragonflies and their relatives the damselflies both belong to an order of insects known as Odonata. They are easy to tell apart – dragonflies perch with their wings held out at right angles to their body and damselflies usually fold up their wings along the line of the body.

Generally, damselflies are smaller and more slender than dragonflies, and their flight is weaker and more fluttery.

There are around 5,000 members of the order Odonata worldwide. In Qatar, a dry, desert land, there are only ten species of dragonfly and two of damselfly recorded to date. There may be more.

Species of dragonfly in Qatar vary greatly in their habits – some stay around the area where they emerged as adult insects, others migrate huge distances. In fact some of the dragonflies in Qatar have flown here from other countries.

All members of the order Odonata must have fresh water in which to lay their eggs and go through their larval form before the larva crawls up a reed out of the water and splits open as the adult dragonfly or damselfly emerges. During the last 60 years, since the beginning of the oil era, lagoons and lakes of effluent water have been created in various part of the peninsula, attracting more species of dragonfly to Qatar.

A crucial aid to identification of species of dragonfly, is a small rectangular 'window' on the outer edge of the wing, known as a pterostigma.

Often it is pigmented, and no two species have the same shape or colour. Entomologists can quickly identify an insect from its pterostigma, and also by counting the segments of the body.

Males and females of the same species are often very differently coloured. The purpose of the pterostigma is not fully understood, but possibly dragonflies themselves use it for identification reasons.

References and Additional Information

Original version of the above article: http://qnhg.org/2010-2011_talks

A write up by Michael Grunwell: http://qnhg.org/files/wpro_shared/docs/DragonflyGuide.pdf



Adult male



Adult female

Monthly Talk Report

Architecture and Art in transition: from Pre-Islamic to Islamic periods.

Fran Gillespie

At a meeting of the Qatar Natural History Group on Wednesday evening Professor Moain Sadeq of the Department of Humanities at Qatar University gave a fascinating presentation on the subject of art and architecture in transition in the Islamic world, demonstrating that what is often thought of as 'typical' Islamic art actually has its origins in far older times.

Starting with a discussion on the smallest examples of art, the design of coins, Sadeq illustrated how the coinage, known as drachms, of the vast Persian Sassanid empire of the 3rd to 7th centuries AD, often depicted elaborately dressed rulers on one side of the coin with a Zoroastrian fire altar on the reverse. After the coming of Islam, which discourages the use of individual portraits, different styles evolved, with dinars and fils employing symbolic rather than pictorial designs



The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, a modern building incorporating ancient architectural traditions

Photo Credit: Fran Gillespie

The speaker then moved on to look at circular designs rather larger than a coin – examples of very early city planning! Baghdad in Iraq, completed around 757 AD in the Abbasid period, was one such planned city, round in shape and surrounded by a wall, and divided into quarters with four gates in the outer perimeter. In a period when most settlements evolved gradually into a shapeless sprawl of buildings, such deliberate planning must have seemed revolutionary, but in fact stems from a very ancient prototype, said the speaker. A clay model has been found of an Assyrian circular city dating to the 7th century BC.

Professor Sadeq compared the design concept of the Museum of Islamic Art [MIA] in Doha, on a purpose-built island surrounded by water, to that of an ancient city surrounded by a wall. The celebrated Chinese-American architect of the museum, IM Pei, claimed to have found his inspiration in the ninth-century ablution fountain which stands in the courtyard of the Ahmed Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo. The fountain incorporates a square base bisected by an arch on each side and featuring horizontal courses of alternating dark and light stone, surmounted by graduated square and hexagonal structures. All of these are echoed in the design of the MIA, whose vast three-sided glass wall overlooking the sea derives from the prayer niche of mosques. But there is one important difference: the fountain is surmounted by a dome, whereas Pei chose to top his building with a cube. This adaptation, said Sadeq, was an acknowledgement of a feature of local Gulf architecture, the 'badgir' or wind tower. Other examples inspired by the wind tower can be found in the architecture of Qatar University.

A further example of ancient architecture inspiring Islamic design which was discussed by the speaker is the Roman basilica, originally deriving from even more ancient sources, which evolved into a large public hall with parallel colonnades and aisles and influenced the design first of Jewish synagogues and Christian churches, and later of large mosques such as the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

In addition there is the spiral minaret, a fine example of which can be seen in the Fanar mosque in the centre of Doha. One of the earliest examples of a spiral minaret is the Samarra mosque in Iraq, dating to 849 AD, but its origins, said Sadeq, are far older, probably deriving from the eighth-century BC ziggurat temples of ancient Mesopotamia.

Rambles (Continued on Page 10)

Sailing to Banana Island

Date: May 2012

Weather was favorable. We sailed to the bay of Banana Island (Jazirat Mishut) (25d 17m 40.21s N, 51d 38m 44.2s E) in six 26ft Colgate class yachts, where we moored for lunch. Some members spent time swimming. Two competent sailors per boat i.e. skipper and 2-I-C were present.



Boats We Sailed with

Jazirat Bin Ghannam (Purple Island)



Members of QNHG at Jazirat bin Ghannam "Purple Island"



Left: Dr. Richard Cuttler talking to the group

Date: October 28, 2012

Jazirat bin Ghannam or Al Khor Island is also known as "Purple Island" due to it being the site of production of purple dye from seashells approximately 3,400 years ago. The dye was used for dyeing the clothes of the elite. It is also surrounded by an abundant expanse of mangroves and has a fine view across the water to Al Khor.

There is a very good description of history of the dye production on p.13-16 and of the mangroves on p.111-113 in Fran Gillespie's book "Discovering Qatar".

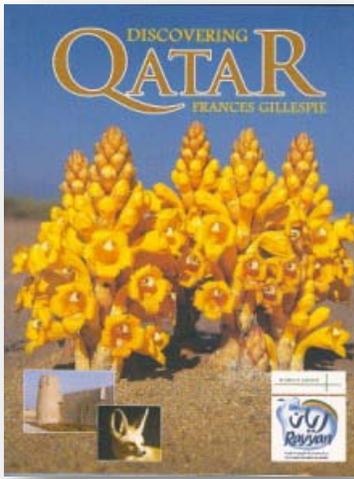
Over 40 people attended the first ramble to Jazirat Bin Ghannam on Saturday, October 20th.



The trip was a real adventure crossing through some tidal flows at high tide. Richard Cuttler, Senior Research Fellow in Archaeology from the University of Birmingham was on hand to give a first hand account of his research done back in 2000 to the site, aptly nicknamed "Purple Island" for its prominence in producing purple dye from seashells approximately 3,400 years ago. Richard explained the processing sites as well as the burial site that is also on the island. The weather was fantastic and the group had an enjoyable first outing.

Authors' Corner

Frances Gillespie



Discovering Qatar was first published at the end of 2006, and an updated second edition was published in 2008. It contains over 200 beautiful photographs, most of them in colour, and 31 sections covering the geology, topography, history, traditional culture and natural history of Qatar.

Many of the pictures were taken by well-known photographers working in the Gulf region.

Discovering Qatar is sponsored by the Rabban Group of companies.



Common Birds of Qatar, the first field and identification guide to the birds of this country, was published in November 2010. Featuring 215 species and over 400 photographs in colour, each page includes a text describing the bird, aimed at the general reader, plus a map of Qatar indicating its distribution, and a bar chart showing which months of the year the birds are likely to be encountered and whether the species is more common or less commonly seen.

Both this and Discovering Qatar are priced at QR 120.00 and are available at most retail outlets in Qatar and on Amazon. Copies signed by the author are available at all QNHG meetings.

Fran's forthcoming publications

2013 will see the publication of 8 more books by Fran Gillespie. On Environment Day in February Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing will launch her series of six hardback books for young children, Qatar Nature Explorer, on the fauna and flora of Qatar. These are lavishly illustrated with photographs and will be available in a boxed set, in both English and Arabic editions. In December BQFP will bring out her book The Blue Jackal: Tales from Islamic Lands of 14 animal fables linked to illustrations on objects on display in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, with double-page illustrations by a distinguished UK-based artist. In June Medina Publishing in London will publish her book Hidden in the Sands: Uncovering Qatar's Past, aimed at junior high school-age readers, giving a picture of all the work and discoveries by archaeologists which have taken place in Qatar over the last half century. It is illustrated with photographs and with reconstruction paintings by Canadian artist Norman Macdonald who has contributed to Saudi Aramco World magazine for 30 years. The book will be linked to an interactive website, which will be regularly updated. Both this book and The Blue Jackal will be published in English and Arabic editions. Qatar Nature Explorer is sponsored by Occidental Petroleum Qatar, The Blue Jackal is sponsored by Qatar Museums Authority and Hidden in the Sands is sponsored by Maersk Oil Qatar.

Rambles (Continued from Pages 4 and 8)

Visit to Sand Dunes

Date: November 16 and 17, 2012

On Friday November 16th and 17th, the QNHG held its second ramble. The overnight camping trip at the Inland Sea was ideally timed to take advantage of a night with not too much moonlight, and when a few shooting stars were expected.

Approximately 30 people gathered around a telescope and gazed at the stars led by Gabriele Marchetti; the highlights of the night were definitely the craters of the Moon and the planet Jupiter with its satellites, but the participants also had a chance to learn more about the stars, the other planets of the solar system, the galaxy and the constellations.



The weather was perfect (another advantage of the timing of the trip) and we managed to dune bash and enjoy a nice campfire".

*Left:
Sand Dunes at the
Inland Sea*

We look forward to you joining us on our QNHG rambles, field trips and at our monthly talks.

Other Current Events

Museum of Islamic Arts

Islamic Glass Exhibition
Arabic Roots

Mathaf, Museum of Modern Art

Tea with Nefertiti
Forever Now
Art of Travel

Katara

Yan Pei Ming

For more information on the above events

See <http://www.qma.com.qa/en/exhibitions>

DECEMBER, 2012

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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