

173 birds, 16 of which were already dead. Abu Dhabi's Environmental Research & Wildlife Development Agency, ERWDA, took receipt of the birds and will attempt to rehabilitate them so that they can be released back into the wild

If found guilty, the smugglers will receive custodial sentences of up to six months, each be fined 5,000-10,000 dirhams and be deported after serving their time in prison.

All species of houbara (the species in Central Asia

and in Arabia is Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* are listed under CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, and international trade in the species is banned. The UAE is a party to the convention, and has been intensifying its efforts to crackdown on illicit trade in wildlife.

**Source: Gulf News 6 January 2004**

## Obituary

### Peter Whybrow

Peter Whybrow, one of the founders of studies of the fossils of the United Arab Emirates, died suddenly on February 13th 2004. He was 61.

He first came to south-eastern Arabia in 1979, to carry out fossil research in Qatar, on behalf of what was then the British Museum (Natural History), and later became The Natural History Museum. During that visit, he made a one-day trip across the border into the Emirates, visiting Jebel Barakah, an outcrop on the coast west of Jebel Dhanna. There he found fossil remains of crocodiles and recognised the importance of the rock outcrops in the Western Region. On another visit to Jebel Barakah, in 1981, working in collaboration with the Geology department of the Emirates University, he found more fossils, including teeth of primitive horses, which he dated to the Late Miocene period, from 5 to 11 million years ago. He returned again in 1984.

At the time, another scientist, Professor Andrew Hill, of Yale University, was also studying the fossils of the Western Region, and the two of them came together to plan a joint programme of research. In 1989 and 1990, they worked in association with the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Al Ain and then, for a further five years, the Whybrow-Hill team carried out further studies with sponsorship from the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO.

The results of their work proved to be of international scientific importance. Over an area stretching from Mirfa to Jebel Barakah, covering over 100 kilometres of the UAE coastline, they found numerous fossil sites, with evidence of a wide range of animals, including early elephants, hippopotami, horses, gazelles, crocodiles, turtles and other species. These were eventually dated to around 6-8 million years ago.

Whybrow also co-ordinated studies of the fossils to be found in the mountains of the eastern UAE, and carried out surveys in Fujairah.

The results of their work, and that of other colleagues, in western Abu Dhabi were the focus of the First International Conference on the Fossil Vertebrates of Arabia, held at Jebel Dhanna in 1995, under the sponsorship of the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, and with the support of ADCO, this later giving rise to the major book 'Fossil Vertebrates of Arabia,' in 1999.

In the process of this research, Whybrow played a major role, not only in co-ordinating and taking part in fieldwork, but also in the associated publication

programme. It was Whybrow, for example, who named and dated the two major rock formations from the Late Miocene in Western Abu Dhabi, the Shuweihat Formation and the later Baynunah Formation, around 6-8 million years old, in which the fossils were found.

Largely as a result of Whybrow's work, Abu Dhabi became well-known internationally as one of the key areas in the world for fossils of the Miocene period.

Accustomed to visiting out-of-the-way places, and to doing things which, to others, might seem a little off-beat, or even suspect, Whybrow derived considerable amusement from events that made his research into the distant past relevant to today. He recounted with pleasure, for example, that, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, he was asked by the British Ministry of Defence if he had any photographs of areas he had studied in the hinterland of Kuwait – the Ministry having managed, in a clear-out of old maps, to throw away all of its material on the Gulf state. The photographs, of geological sections of a wadi in north-west Kuwait, proved to be of considerable interest to the military planners. Whybrow himself spent part of the period immediately prior to the US-led counter-attack to expel the Iraqis carrying out field research in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi. There, equipped with an identity pass issued by GHQ that described him as a civilian fossil expert, he encountered on several occasions US troops carrying out exercises. The troops apparently found it a little difficult to believe that he was, as his pass said, simply looking for fossils, offering him both endless cups of tea and snappy salutes!

Whybrow spent most of his working life as a research scientist in the Palaeontology Department of the Natural History Museum in London, carrying out fieldwork not only in the UAE and Qatar, but also in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan, as well as in the Sahel belt of Africa and in Europe. Some of his tales of fossil-hunting, as well as those of other palaeontologists, were included in a book 'Travels with The Fossil Hunters', published by the Museum in 2000.

He retired early in 2002, moving to Cornwall in south-west England, with his wife, Valerie, a former colleague at the Natural History Museum, and two young sons. Ill-health, sadly, prevented him from returning to the UAE, to take part in the continuing studies of Abu Dhabi's fossils being undertaken, with his encouragement, by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey.

Instead, he became a keen amateur gardener, and it was, appropriately, in his garden that he died of a heart attack, surrounded by the plants that he loved.

**Peter Hellyer**