

## Early Islamic site at Sweihan

Evidence of an archaeological site dating to the seventh century AD, around the beginning of the Islamic era, has been discovered at the headquarters of the National Avian Research Centre at Sweihan, around eighty kilometres east of Abu Dhabi.

During construction of a perimeter fence for the research station, a large decorated sherd of blue-green glazed pottery was found, while two similar sherds were found nearby a few months later.

According to the pottery specialist of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project, the pottery is typical of the late Sassanian - early Islamic period.

Although there have been discoveries of sites from the same period on islands in Abu Dhabi's Western Region, in particular Sir Bani Yas, this is the first archaeological evidence from the period known to have been found inland in Emirate of Abu Dhabi, although it is well-known in the northern Emirate of Ras al Khaimah.

NARC staff have undertaken a watching brief to record any more pottery that may turn up on the site.

Peter Hellyer

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## Sheikh Mubarak Natural History Prize

As usual, a number of nominations were received from members of the Group, as well as from members of the Al Ain and Dubai Natural History Groups, for the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed Annual Prize for Natural History, established by our Patron, HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak al Nahayan.

The ENHG Committee decided at its June meeting to award the prize to Colin Richardson, the Secretary of the Emirates Bird Records Committee and author of the

standard work on UAE ornithology, '*Birds of the UAE*,' in recognition of his major contributions not only to the study of the country's bird life, but also to the promotion of knowledge of that bird life in ornithological and other scientific circles overseas.

The prize, the only one of its kind in the UAE, was presented to Colin by HE Sheikh Nahayan at a special award ceremony in early November and includes an inscribed silver dhow and a cash award.

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## A follow up on the Fujairah oil spill

In March 1994 sixteen thousand tons of mineral oil entered the waters of the Arabian Sea off Fujairah. Rapid impact assessments on inter tidal ecosystems revealed that a major disaster did not take place, and mangroves and salt marshes remained unaffected (Böer & Griggs 1994). Natural self-cleaning was taking place on sandy, and rocky shores, and marine organisms recruited the affected inter tidal areas. Only limited evidence remained on the coastline by October 1995.

A follow up survey was conducted on October 23, one and a half years after the spill, at the same locations as the previous surveys. The visual evidence of oil from the March 1994 Fujairah oil spill was limited. At two sample sites on sandy beaches, thin transparent oil sheens on the ground water were found. At two sample sites on gravelly beaches old weathered tar was found, smearing the surface. All rocky beaches were visually clean. Fresh tar balls from recent minor oil incidents were observed at several sandy beaches. The recruitment of marine organisms was happening at each of the 28 locations. A variety of organisms, such as crustaceans, fish, barnacles, snails, muscles, green algae, brown algae, and cyanobacteria were found, depending on the beach type.

In order to quantify the impact on the marine ecology, some competent long-term biological and chemical monitoring should be initiated, and the data should be compared with the pre-oil spill situation, and with unaffected control sites. Only this can reveal the real damage to the environment.

In case of future oil spills, major long-term impacts are expected in case of affected low energy beaches, such as mangroves and salt marshes, and minor short-term impacts are expected in case of smeared high energy beaches, such as rocky, gravelly or sandy shores. Even massive oil spills though, such as the 1991 Gulf War Oil Spill, do not necessarily have a detrimental impact on submarine wildlife (Richmond 1994; Vogt 1994; Robineau & Fiquet 1994; Krupp *et. al.* 1994).

In comparison to historical oil spills, the March 1994 Fujairah incident was a minor disaster, and very limited evidence of continuing impact was found in October 1995. However, tanker activities off Fujairah are regularly causing oil spills, and several cases have been reported since March 1994 own observations. Urgent action is required.