

# RECORDERS' REPORTS

## Archaeology

As usual, the winter of 1995-1996 has seen extensive archaeological activity throughout the Emirates, with both foreign and local teams being involved.

In Abu Dhabi, the main focus of attention has been on the continuing work of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey. In January and February, a three member ADIAS team carried out investigations on the island of Balghelam, north east of Abu Dhabi, into a collection of features on a relict shoreline. Conducted with the support of the island's owner, Presidential Court Chamberlain Sheikh Surour bin Mohammed al Nahyan, the work identified a group of at least eleven water wells, one of which produced pottery dating back to the Sixteenth Century AD. Contemporary with these was more pottery found under an alignment of three small walls associated with a group of hearths, some of which, up to 1.1 metres by 1.4 metres in size, may have been used for proto-industrial activity. The work, which will be resumed next winter, represented the first detailed study of archaeological features of a type found on relict shorelines on many of Abu Dhabi's islands, and should help considerably in providing a better understanding of the nature of occupation of the islands during the Late Islamic period.

In March and April, the main ADIAS season, further work was undertaken on the pre-Islamic Nestorian monastic site on Sir Bani Yas, completing excavation of the church at the heart of the complex and recovering a substantial number of pieces of finely decorated plaster that further confirm the sophistication of the monastery's inhabitants.

ADIAS survey teams also visited other islands in the Western Region, including Ghaghah, Al F'zaiyyah, Yasat al Ulya and Yasat Sufia, continuing mapping of pre-Islamic and Islamic sites, while at the end of April, an archaeological survey along the route of a new Main Oil Line was carried out for ENHG Corporate member the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, which along with several other Corporate members, continued to provide valuable logistic support throughout the season.

The most active of the northern emirates in an archaeological sense were Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah and Sharjah. In Fujairah, the team from Australia's University of Sydney, led by Professor Dan Potts, continued its extensive surveying in the Hajar Mountains, identifying several dozen previously unrecognised copper mining sites. Carbon 14 dating carried out from one of the sites, in the Wadi Hayl, showed for the first time that the local copper industry continued at least until the Fourteenth Century AD, several hundred years later than had previously been recognised. Potts and his team also discovered several new groupings of petroglyphs in the mountains, including one large grouping in Wadi Hayl, and also carried out trial excavations on an Iron Age fortress lying underneath a Late Islamic fort in the village of Awhalla.

In Ras al Khaimah, the local Department of Archaeology and Antiquities continued work on the large 'tell' at Qush, which has produced evidence of continuous occupation from the late Iron Age until the Abbasid period, around 1,500 years later. One of the largest 'tells' in the Emirates, the Qush site will require several more years of excavation, and should add substantially to understanding of the chronology of pottery sequences in the northern emirates.

Also in Ras al Khaimah, a German team led by Burkhard Vogt carried out rescue excavations on Second Millennium tombs in Shimal and near the mountain village of Idhn, adding to knowledge of the Wadi Suq period.

Another foreign team, working with the support of Britain's Woolwich Building Society, also carried out an extensive survey of the architecture of Ras al Khaimah's surviving traditional mosques, following on from a survey of fortified buildings completed several years ago, and reported in *Tribulus* Vol 2.2. (See Book review on P. 31).

In Sharjah, the local team, directed by Dr. Sabah Jasssem, continued work at Jebel Buhays, in the Madam Plain, concentrating on an important cemetery believed to date back to the Late Stone Age. Analysis of the skeletal material is being carried out by Germany's University of Tubingen. Extensive work was also carried out in the environs of Khor Fakkan on the East Coast, on an early Second Millennium BC cemetery, while excavations in the Abu Shagara area in Sharjah town produced evidence of occupation from the 'Ubaid period, around 7,000 years ago.

A joint Spanish-French team also continued work on the Iron Age village at Al Thuqaibah, near Madam, which dates back to around 1,000 BC.

On the East Coast, a British team also carried out a further season of work on a Third to Second Millennium BC site in Kalba.

Elsewhere, the team from Belgium's University of Ghent carried out a final season of work at the First Millennium AD site at Ad Door in Umm al Qaiwain, while in Dubai, the local Museum continued excavations on the early Islamic settlement in the Jumeirah district, which have already produced the most extensive evidence from the period known anywhere in the Emirates.

While both local departments and foreign missions continue to be active in UAE archaeology, it is a matter of some regret, not least to the foreign missions, that there is still only minimal involvement in local archaeology by UAE citizens. The Emirates University, whose Department of History formerly offered some courses in archaeology, has recently downgraded the importance it attaches to the subject, and UAE students interested in the subject can no longer receive any formal training within the country. Moreover, there is little sign of would-be local archaeologists taking advantage of the presence of highly-qualified and well-experienced

foreign teams to gain field experience.

It is to be hoped that this failing will be remedied before the foreign teams, who have so much expertise to

share, move on to work in other countries.

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## Birds

### November 1995

At last early mornings and evenings began to feel cooler with temperatures in the range 24-28°C. By day the air was calm and temperatures remained around the 35°C mark until the third week when temperatures dropped perceptibly to around the 29-32°C range. The winter was heralded by a *shamal* (a strong west wind) on 26th when scattered clouds appeared and remained to the end of the month.

Wetland species took the spotlight in November with a **Ruddy Shelduck** (14th record) and a female **Red-crested Pochard** (6th record) at Khor Dubai on the 21st, the latter remaining to the end of the month. On the 17th nine **Greylag Geese** were seen flying over Jab-el Hafit. At Zabeel fish ponds a **Ferruginous Duck** remained throughout the month while eagles arrived in force at Khor Dubai. An amazing selection were found including a **Short-toed Eagle** on 10th, a **Booted Eagle** on 23rd and up to six **Spotted Eagles** throughout the month. Single **Lesser Spotted Eagles** were at Ramtha tip 10-19th, at Al Ain camel track 17th and at Khor Dubai from 23rd (reported well into December), only the 5th-7th records. A **Griffon Vulture** was seen over Jebel Hafit on the 16th. A **Purple Gallinule** was at Ramtha tip from 10th-19th (5th record) and a late **Spotted Crake** was at Ramtha tip on 10th. **Great Knot** numbers at Khor al Beidah had increased to six by 19th while two **Common Knots** were reported at Khor Dubai on 6th (possible 4th record). **White-tailed Plovers** were reported at several sewage water locations, including a maximum of eight at Ramtha tip on 18th, while a **Caspian Plover** was found at Al Wathba on 2nd. One **Dotterel** was at Al Wathba on 2nd and four were at Hamranniyah on 16th (17th & 18th records). A rather rare **Great Snipe** was found at Dhayah on 10th.

A **Short-eared Owl** was a local rarity at Al Wathba from 18th to the end of the month. A **Blyth's Pipit** was at Abu Dhabi race course and four were at Al Wathba from 2nd, while an **Olive-backed Pipit** (15th record) was at Bateen Airport park on 2nd. 5 **Richard's Pipits** were present all months at Al Wathba camel track fields. A **Long-billed Pipit** was seen at Khor Kalba on 28th. A **Pechora Pipit** was reported on the Kalba cornice on 28th for a possible 1st record if accepted. Up to 29 **Bimaculated Lark** were at Al Wathba from 2nd and four were at the Al Ain camel track on 13th, while one **Oriental Skylark** was seen briefly at Al Wathba on 2nd. Seven **Hypocotilus** were at Al Wathba plantation from 2nd until at least 15th. 20 more were found at Sila from 10th until at least the 25th. A **Robin**, a rare winter visitor, was reported in Bateen gardens on 26th, while at the Emirates Golf Course a **Black-throated Thrush** on 10th was the season's only sighting so far. A **Moustached Warbler** (6th record) was at Ain al Faydah on

17th and at least two **Sykes's (Booted) Warblers** were singing at Khor Kalba on 15th. One **Brambling** (16th record) was at Hamranniyah on 16th & 17th while a single **Spanish Sparrow** was also there on 16th.

### December 1995

December was dominated by overcast skies and intermittent rain showers. This rather unseasonal weather (more like February) subdued most birds and made them very hard to find, if they had indeed hung around in such conditions. The rain started on 7th and proceeded with vigour on 11th when it became almost daily until the end of the month. Daily temperatures dropped from an average of 28°C in the sunny first days of the month to only about 20°C during rain.

Offshore produced some interest, with six **Masked Boobies** (4th record) on 1 December off Khor Fakkan, while at Khor Dubai a **Ruddy Shelduck** (15th record) lingered for a few days from 21st. Also at Khor Dubai an **Imperial Eagle** was worth watching from the 21st. Another was reported from Hamranniyah on 15th. A **Little Pratincole** (7th record) was at Khor Kalba on 2nd and a **White-breasted Waterhen** (3rd record) was found at the Jebel Ali Hotel gardens on 8th. A **White-breasted Kingfisher**, only the 3rd record, was a surprising find at Dhayah mangroves on 28th. Two **Oriental Skylarks** were discovered at the Al Wathba camel track on 26th, while a **Blyth's Pipit** (approx. 13th record) was a good bird to watch at the Abu Dhabi horse race track from 21st. A **Long-billed Pipit** at Al Wathba camel track on the 1st was unusual, while a late **Tree Pipit** at the Jebel Ali Hotel on 15th and 7 **Richard's Pipits** at Al Wathba on the 19th, were noteworthy. Not so mundane for Arabia, a male **Blackbird** at Jebel Ali on 8th was only the 12th record! A **Brambling** at Al Wathba on 1st was the 17th record and a **Little Bunting** on Das Island on 21st was the 9th record.

### January 1996

In Dubai the unsettled weather continued throughout January, with overcast skies on most days. There were strong south-westerly winds in mid month followed by more rain showers on the 17th and heavy rain overnight on the 23rd. Clear skies were not noted until the 29th. Temperatures remained around 22°C, rarely peaking to 25°C.

Many good sightings were reported, including the winter's only **White Stork** at Al Ain camel track on the 1st, a **Ruddy Shelduck** at Al Ghar Lake from 22nd (15th record) and a female **Red-crested Pochard** which remained at Khor Dubai until at least the 4th (6th record). Bird of the month was a **Crested Honey Buzzard** at Zabeel from the 16th, the 2nd UAE record and only the 3rd for Arabia.

A **Goshawk** at Qarn Nazwa during the week ending