

## Jerusalem update, June 2012

To update the information provided by Jon Hall, here are comments on species in and around Jerusalem seen during a very brief trip mostly centered on academic research.

Species come first, in the usual taxonomic order, followed by three site locations. I've skipped Latin names since there's no confusion with these (few) species.

### *species*

[ **Naked-rumped Tomb Bat ?** ]—a large, fast bat was foraging around Ein Gedi an hour before sunrise: identification is just a wild guess.

**Jackal**—one at the bird ringing station, 0300 hours, central Jerusalem. Directions below.

**Red Fox**—three seen in the half hour before and after sunrise, at the beach, the field school, and the date orchards of Ein Gedi. Interestingly these were all a very rangy looking race, piebald blonde with black bellies and very slim builds. One had caught a partridge. A fourth red fox may have been at Mineral Beach but it was too far away to be sure.

**Ruppell's Fox**—one ran in front of the car on the short side road half way between Highway 90 and the security checkpoint for Masada, an hour before sunrise.

[ **hybrid felid** ]—a possible Sand Cat x House Cat mix was present half an hour before sunrise at the beach campground at Ein Gedi. It had the markings of a Sand Cat (and fit well the illustration in *Mammals of Europe and the Middle-East*, Aulagnier et alia; this would be the *harrisoni* subspecies, based on range), but on this wee beastie the structure was off: head not broad enough, ears not triangular enough. Probable mix?

**Rock Hyrax**—approximately one ka-jillion in and around Ein Gedi. Seen as soon as it began to get light at predawn and active from then on.

**Mountain Gazelle**—at least three manage to persist in the Valley of the Gazelles, central Jerusalem. This site has been formally declared a nature preserve-to-be, and supposedly will have better enforcement and a visitor center. My taxi driver took me to the wrong place and the hotel clerk (who lives nearby) could not read a map, so gave me the wrong directions also. In the end, I figured out the right scrubby arroyo to be in (see below for correct directions). Among other issues, they have been hit often by cars, and at least once, somebody was hunting them with attack dogs. Will the final 3 or 4 survive long enough for the preserve to become established? Not sure on that one. Very skittish: when I reached into my pack to ease out a camera, they took off. In the overgrown, weedy grass, they could be hard to find. I assume early morning is best, but that's just a hunch. Due to delays in finding the site, I was not there until after 0800.

**Nubian Ibex**—despite being warned by a non-naturalist tour guide that they had not been being seen recently at Ein Gedi, in fact at dawn (at least as of June 2012), they were fairly common. The nature trails there do not open until 0800 (in summer? at the Dead Sea? are they mad?), so at least in summer many tourists may miss them, since later in the day it may be too hot. Just at first light they were easy to find. See directions below.

**Indian Crested Porcupine**—at least one is resident at the bird ringing station; one seen at 0300 hours one night and maybe the same one at midnight, a second night. I was told sometimes it is (they are?) still puttering about at first light when the ringers go to work. Skittish though: both times, as soon as it realized I was there, it scuttled into the brush.

### *things not seen*

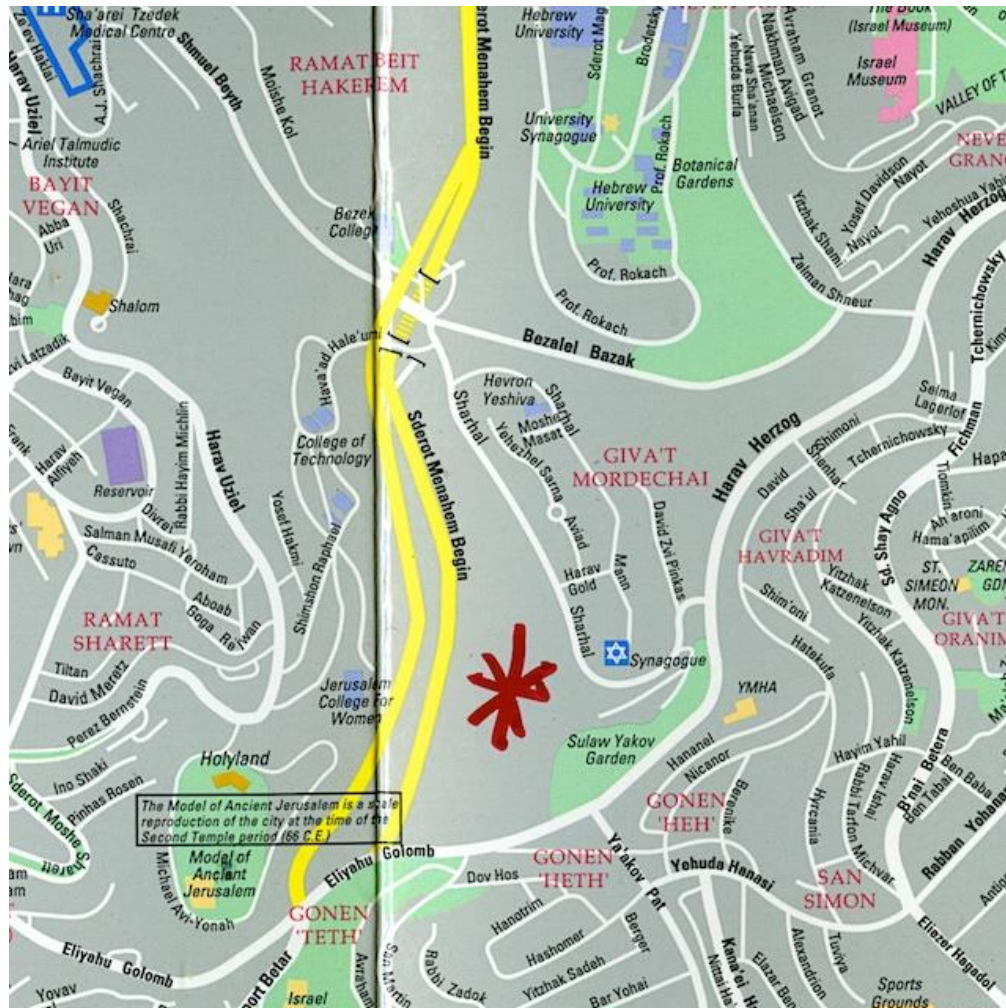
Contra Jon Hall's good luck, I had no hedgehogs at the bird ringing station, but I was only there twice, in the middle of the night each time (just a schedule thing). Just after dark might be better? The birders who work there indicated they were not common though.

Driving from Jerusalem to Ein Gedi on the Dead Sea from 0300 to 0430, I had zero rodents on the road. Zip, nothing, nada. Traffic was light, there just wasn't anything skittering around. Half-moon was up, but that should not have made so much of a difference? Densities are just way low?

## Locations

### Valley of the Gazelles, SW Central Jerusalem

This is sign-posted once you get there. It is a broad “arroyo” type valley between busy roads. It is south of the Jerusalem University Botanical Gardens but is not the first weedy valley, but the next one further south. It is between Giv A'T Mordechai community and Gonen 'Heth' and is contiguous with Sulaw Yakov Garden. The bottom end of it touches the intersection of Sderot Menahem Begin and Eliyahu Golomb. The closest tourist attraction would be the Model of Ancient Jerusalem, just west. See map, attached.



### **Bird Ringing Station, Central Jerusalem**

This is on the east side of Sacher Park, closer to the Supreme Court than to the Knesset, downhill from Wohl Rose Park and just south of a weedy cemetery. There's a small parking lot above it, between Wohl Rose and the bird site itself. There's a blind (aka a hide) overlooking a pond, which would be the first place to check after dark. There are signs on the roads nearby for this site but not once you get into the park complex. It is on the slope of the hill, above the manicured lawns of the park at the lower street, but lower than the crown of the hill in the rose gardens proper. So far as I know there is no restriction about being there after hours.

### **Ibex site, Ein Gedi**

This is the famous nature hike oasis on the Dead Sea. On the inland side of the highway there are several trails (fee required) and date palm orchards; on the beach side, there is a campground and little caravan convenience store. At night, on the inland side (the oasis side), everything is locked up behind security gates and in theory one shouldn't even drive into the car park for the trail entrances. (There was a barrier, easily by-passed.) At first light, though, there's a good observation point for ibex, hyraxes, and birds. If coming southbound on Highway 90, take the first signed turn-off for the Ein Gedi complexes, taking the right fork and going past the youth hostel up the hill almost to the entrance gates of the field school. There's a broad pullout here on the left as one drives up the hill, and it's a good place to scan the valley. (There's no guard rail: be cautious if turning around in the dark.) Ibex may be on the school grounds, just outside the school fence, or on either side of the obvious canyon to the west leading up to a waterfall. At sunrise you have good views from here of birds, as well.

The ibex may be in the trailhead car parks, too, at least seasonally, since there are photos of that on the Internet. But as of June 2012, one could see them well from this pullout on the shoulder of the road by the field school. Birders at the banding station indicated this is a reliable site to try year-round; the ibex are fairly habituated.

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