

## MOROCCO, WESTERN SAHARA and MAURITANIA 2013

In 2013 I spent first 10 days in Western Sahara (February), then 3 weeks in Morocco and Western Sahara (December).

### I WESTERN SAHARA FEBRUARY 2013

I flew from Paris to Casablanca, then to Dakhla where I hired a car for 11 days. I visited:

- the area around Dakhla but never saw any cetacean (like in December)
- the road to Aouerd and Tichla (3 times 2h spotlighting)
- the road to Barbas Cap and Guerguerat (border with Mauritania).

Mammals seen:

Rüppel's fox: 1 and 1 dead

Fennec:2

Striped polecat:1

Desert hedgehog: 4

Lesser Egyptian Gerboa: a lot

Gerbil: a lot (I identified several Lesser Egyptian Gerbils)

Savanna hare: 7

Dolphins sp: 2

I looked hard for Mediterranean monk seal but didn't see any. But I got plenty of informations from locals, mainly from the army and the Royal marine. In fact there is at least one small colony between Barbas Cap and the border with Mauritania. I know exactly where they are, but because it is a military zone you need a permit delivered in the capital to visit this place. There is a Spanish scientist studying them. So my only chance to see one was to go to Mauritania. It is why I decided to go back in December and also because my torch was not enough powerful for spotlighting.

### II MOROCCO AND WESTERN SAHARE DECEMBER 2013

I first spent 4 days in Morocco, then travelled to Western Sahara and spent by the end 2 more days in Morocco.

#### a)MOROCCO

Tifnit and Arrouais fenced reserve: 130 Scimitar Horned oryx, 12 Dorcas gazelles, 1 Barbary ground squirrel. This place is close and south of Agadir.

Oued Massa national park: 2 Barbary ground squirrels, 4 dead Algerian hedgehogs, footprints of Wild boars, droppings of Egyptian mongoose

Taka and Rokein fenced reserve: 24 Dorcas gazelles, 1 Addax. It is not easy to see the animals from outside this reserve which is south of Agadir.

Cascade d'Ouzoud: 1 Barbary ground squirrel, 22 Barbary macaques

Tafinegoult: very good sighting at close enclosure (10m) of 4 Cuvier's gazelles (1 male, 2 females and a young one), 10+ Barbary ground squirrels

Tizi n Test road between Marrakech and Tafinegoult: There are at least 3 fenced areas where there are Barbary sheep. Coming from Marrakech you find a first one on the left side of the road before Ouirgane, but I don't think it is large. I saw 4 males. In front there is the large Royal Reserve: I saw 26. Then you find higher up a fenced area for hunting. I didn't try to see them there. But they are also animals outside the fenced areas, you have just to look hard. In the past I saw twice a group near Ouirgane in Takerhort reserve.

b) Western Sahara

Aousserd road: 3 Rüppel's fox, 2 Fennecs, 2 Savanna hares, 1 Lesser Egyptian gerbil.

Safia fenced reserve: This place is just 17km north of the Mauritanian border. As the road is sandy I walked to this place. It is only 7km from the main road. The visibility was very bad even by daylight (the atmosphere was milky). Arriving at the reserve I was welcome and guided to the flat roof of the house bordering the place. I saw 4 Addax, but unfortunately no Dama gazelles due to the bad weather. There are also rednecked Ostriches. Outside the reserve I saw droppings of Dorcas Gazelles (they are the only gazelles here) and the guards confirmed me that they are still present.

### III MAURITANIA

As the seals were out of reach in Western Sahara I decided to go to Cap Blanc in Mauritania which has always been told to be the place of a colony. In fact the colony of more than 200 animals is between Cap Blanc and Guerguerat, the border town.

I went to Nouadhibou by shared taxi, leaving my car in Dakhla. Since December 2013 it is now again possible to get your visa at the border. The Police is now equipped with computer, camera and can take your fingerprints.

I stayed 3 nights in Nouadhibou and went by taxi to Cap Blanc reserve where I stayed 2 full days. I saw a male Mediterranean monk seal which is generally alone. I was told that sometimes there is a second male coming, and that 2 years ago a female was laying on the beach just next. The resident male was caught as a baby very near the colony, bred for 2 years in a museum and then released there 17 years ago. It is not shy, but not tame as some people say.

I walked far on the way to Lagouira hoping to see another one, but without any success.

The main colony is just 30 or 35km north, but again the access is impossible. It is a military zone controlled by the Mauritanian army. In fact it is in Western Sahara, so in Morocco, but for

security reasons Mauritania has been granted to secure the place. Nevertheless the sea and coast are still Moroccan property. A conflict not yet solved.

I saw several times 3 Harbor porpoises.

Dominique BRUGIERE

If you need more informations, contact me at [brugiere.dom@sfr.fr](mailto:brugiere.dom@sfr.fr)