

IRAN 2009

In 2009 I visited Iran. Together with people of the Department of Environment of Iran I participated in the mid-winter census of waterbirds in the province of Fars. Fars is situated in the south-west corner of the country. The northern part of the province can be very cold while the south part has a milder climate like the provinces along the Persian Gulf.

All the important wetlands of the province, like seasonal salt-lakes, rivers, freshwater lakes, lakes near dams, were counted. Because of the extreme drought in the past years many wetlands were completely dry, therefore we had time to visit other types of habitat like deserts, mountains, steppes to see the wildlife there. In 2007 I also visited this province because of the very interesting wildlife. In 2005 I was in Golestan in the north of Iran at the south-east corner of the Caspian Sea.

In the whole of Iran there is a high hunting pressure and many bird and mammal-species are becoming very rare or populations are declining.

DASHT-E KONAR

This area is a large plain like a steppe. It is very dry in summer but in winter there also is a seasonal river. We visited this area for seeing the Houbara Bustard, *Chlamydotis undulata*. During the day we saw several Persian Gerbils, *Meriones persicus* near small bushes and European Hares, *Lepus europaeus* (a subspecies with larger ears than in Europe) running on the plain.

At the end of the day Common Foxes, *Vulpes vulpes* were walking near a small group of Houbara's and we heard Golden Jackals, *Canis aureus* howling. The Common Fox here is more grey. Some semi-domestic Camels were feeding on Tamarisks near the stream.

This area is also good for Indian Gazelle, *Gazella benetti*.

BAHRAM-E GOOR

Bahram-e Goor is one of the most important reserves of Iran. It is official a protected area and a smaller part of it a National Park since 1 year. It is so important because it has one of the last two remaining populations of Onager, *Equus hemionus onager*.

We saw two small herds of Onager during our visit, a total of 28. Some Indian Gazelles were seen too by the rangers.

I saw this species in 2007 here (46) and a total of 97 Onager at far distance then.

In this park there is also a population of Leopards, *Panthera pardus saxicolor* and it is home to Striped Hyena, *Hyena hyena* Common and Sand Fox, *Vulpes rueppelli*.

ARJAN & PARISHAN

These two areas are wetlands, freshwater swamps/lakes, which are very important for migrating and wintering waterbirds. Between these two wetlands there are mountains covered with oak trees.

The whole area has some kind of protection and there is a research area for the Persian Fallow Deer, *Dama mesopotamica* which has been re-introduced here. During the bird-countings we spent some time here to look for the deer and we saw a group of 10 males.

Near the lake of Parishan we saw several Common Foxes. In 2007 I also saw here Jungle Cat, *Felis chaus* Striped Hyena and Indian grey Mongoose, *Herpestes edwardsii*. In the mountains there still is a small population of Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos syriacus*.

BAKHTEGAN NATIONAL PARK

This national park covers 2 very large seasonal salt lakes with in between them an area with dry mountains. In years with heavy rain these lakes are connected in the northern part of the park and then they form one lake. The lakes are important for Flamingoes as a breeding and wintering site.

In the mountains we saw 2 groups of Wild Goats/ Persian Ibex, *ibex aegagrus* a total of 30. During a night drive we only saw 3 hares in the area and a Common Fox

In 2007 we saw here also Porcupine, *Hystrix indica* Sand Fox, Golden Jackal, Wild Cat and a Caracal, *Caracal caracal* during daylight.

There are Leopards, Striped Hyenas and Wild Sheep/Mouflon. *Ovis orientalis* in this park too. Goitered Gazelle, *Gazella subgutturosa* will be re-introduced here this year.

HORMOD PROTECTED AREA

This area is in the southern part of Fars province. The climate here is very dry and hot, Hormod is like a desert, great plains with almost no vegetation, some wadi's and mountains.

This is the only place in the world to see the smallest Sheep; the Larestan Mouflon, *Ovis orientalis laristanica*. We saw several groups in the mountains, more than a hundred animals. They feed on the steppes and run into the mountains immediately when they see humans. They are very shy and difficult to see. There is a lot of hunting in this area. We were very lucky to see 2 Indian Gazelles as well because they were very rare in the part we visited.

BAMOO NATIONAL PARK

At the last day of my trip to Iran we visited this park which is very near to the city of Shiraz, the capital of Fars province. It was also the highlight for seeing mammal species. We hoped to see Leopard but we knew it was almost impossible during one day visit but we managed to see some fresh tracks.

We drove around the area for the whole day. We saw several groups of Goitered Gazelle and a big herd of Mouflon (subspecies of Shiraz area) grazing on the steppes. It was strange to see 8 Wild Boar, *Sus scrofa* in a habitat like this because I knew them only from forests in Europe. In the surrounding mountains we saw 7 Wild Goats.

In the evening we did some spotlighting and we were very eager to see Striped Hyena. We drove around for a long time seeing even more Goitered Gazelles in the dark, some Hares and Common Foxes (which was indeed very common here) a lonely Golden Jackal and..... In the last hour in the park..... very close to the car..... two very beautiful Striped Hyenas.