

Azerbaijan 2007

I visited Azerbaijan in 2007 for my work and had just one day to look around for mammals. My trip started in Baku at 6 AM. I did not use any local guide just rented a taxi with the driver. My first stop was in **Gobustan State Reserve** located west of the settlement of Gobustan, about 64 km southwest of the centre of Baku. Although not a place for mammal watching today it was wildly used for that purpose in prehistoric times. Several hundreds of rock carvings (petroglyphs) left by Neolithic mammal watchers (5,000-20,000 years ago) represent red deers, ibexes (bezoar goats), horses, wild boars, gazelles and buffalos (probably extinct wild cattle species- wisent). The place is also know for a jail, so photography may be hazardous. No more than few kilometers from the reserve several mud volcanoes are easily accessible (but in the middle of nowhere so ask the staff of the reserve for help).



One of the Gobustan Petroglyphs



Mud volcano

Starting in Gobustan at around 11 AM we have reached Shirvan national Park at 12.00 PM. The place is famous for Djeyran gazelles (**Goitered, Black-tailed** or **Persian gazelle- *Gazella subgutturosa***). Although it was too late (or too early) for any serious observation I went for a short trip in lada niva (Russian land rover) car used by the park staff. In just half an hour we have seen several hundreds gazelles. We also met **Russian photographer**, who claimed to see a wolf in a morning.



Typical Shirvan landscape





Persian Gazelles

Shirvan National Park is easily accessible from the road and has the area of 543.74 km². The landscape is semi-desert with few lakes. It borders Caspian sea and is tough to be one of the best places in Azerbaijan for bird watching. The staff is very helpful and willing to show the park. As I learned from chief biologist today's abundance of the gazelles is a result of the strict protection in past 10 years. Unfortunately several oil pumps are still in use in the park and spoil the landscape (but do not seem to disturb gazelles).

I have finished that day dinning by the famous "burning mountain" (yanar dag) fire which blazes continuously on a hillside on the Absheron Peninsula on the Caspian Sea. The place around seems to be good for small desert mammals although Baku sprawl is encroaching. Anyway I had a chance to spot a **red fox** (*vulpes vulpes*) there.

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