

# Report of mammals seen in Israel, October 28 – November 11, 2012

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## Introduction

In October - November 2012 my girlfriend Ellen and I made a two-week trip to Israel. Since Ellen isn't that much into mammalwatching this was no hardcore mammalwatching trip. We were based in Eilat, having booked a package tour. Eilat offers some excellent mammalwatching opportunities, all easily reached by car and within 50 kilometers from town. I also made two trips to Ein Shahak (about 150 kilometers north of Eilat) in search of Arabian Oryx, and we went up north for three days visiting the Dead Sea, Ein Gedi, Masada and Jerusalem.

Recorded below is the list of mammals recorded during my trip, including some notes for each species seen. Should you need any more detailed information please contact me at [marijnissentimo@hotmail.com](mailto:marijnissentimo@hotmail.com) and I will try to help you out.

## List of mammals seen

### White-breasted Hedgehog *Erinaceus concolor*

Three were seen in front of the hide at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.



Typical White-breasted Hedgehog (left) and one of two much darker individuals (right).

### Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

Golden Jackals were seen at each of five spotlighting sessions at Yotvata circular fields, with a maximum of six on one night. They showed brilliantly whilst hunting for rodents in the main circular field. Two were seen here early morning on October 30. One was heard calling at dusk in a suburban park in Jerusalem on November 2<sup>nd</sup> whilst on our way to the Jerusalem Bird Observatory.

### Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Red Foxes were seen whilst spotlighting along highway 90 near Yotvata on October 30 (one) and at Yotvata circular fields on October 31 (two) and November 3<sup>rd</sup> (three). Interesting looking form, having pale, sandy colored fur and being more slender compared to the Red Foxes back home in The Netherlands.

### **Rock Hyrax *Procavia capensis***

Common (and extremely tame) at Ein Gedi with dozens seen on November 1<sup>st</sup> in Wadi David.



*Rock Hyraxes were extremely tame at Ein Gedi.*

### **Dorcas Gazelle *Gazella dorcas***

Dorcas Gazelles were pleasantly common, with a total of 53 noted. Seen on several sites off highway 90 (some of which just north of Eilat), the Acacia Gazelle reserve just south of Yotvata, Ein Shahak and Shezaf Nature Reserve.

### **Acacia Gazelle *Gazella acacia***

After the recent split from Mountain Gazelle (*Gazella gazella*) in Handbook of the Mammals of the World, I was keen to see this extremely rare gazelle. The remaining population consists of only about 60 individuals, and is confined to a small reserve just south of Yotvata. With the population reaching critically low numbers, it was decided in 2004 to protect the remaining gazelles from predators by fencing a 6 km<sup>2</sup> area, and confining the gazelles therein. By doing so the population increased, but for mammalwatchers it caused a dilemma: whether to tick or not to tick a species which is confined in a fenced area. Next to this, its taxonomy is subject to debate. Depending on which literature you use Acacia Gazelle is considered to be a separate species, a subspecies of Mountain Gazelle (*Gazella gazella acacia*) or an end population of *Gazella gazella cora*, which in itself is sometimes considered a separate species, Arabian Desert Gazelle (*Gazella cora*).

Anyway, on October 31, I saw one Acacia Gazelle in the reserve just south of Yotvata (west of Highway 90, opposite the Yotvata Hai-Bar Nature Reserve). All other gazelles seen in the reserve proved to be Dorcas Gazelles - which are also present in the reserve - or were not seen well enough for positive identification as Acacia Gazelle.



*Acacia Gazelle (top left) and Dorcas Gazelles (other three pictures). Note the blackish lateral stripe in the Acacia Gazelle, the best field mark to distinguish it from Dorcas Gazelle.*

### **Nubian Ibex *Capra nubiana***

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 22 were seen at Ein Gedi in Wadi David. The ibex were very tame, showing just a few feet off the walking trails. Five (including one very impressive male) were seen on November 7<sup>th</sup> at Eilat Mountains.



*Two fighting male Nubian Ibex at Ein Gedi.*



### **Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx***

Mammal of the trip! Five of these exquisite mammals were seen near Ein Shahak at first light on November 5<sup>th</sup>. They were very shy, taking off into the desert as soon as they noticed me – at that time they were still more than a kilometer away from me. I spend hours trying to relocate them in the vast desert, to no avail.

Ein Shahak is one of several sites where Arabian Oryx was reintroduced in Israel in the late 1990's. With most (if not all) of the other sites located in military firing ranges, Ein Shahak is probably your best bet to see this enigmatic mammal in Israel. On a return visit next morning I didn't see any oryx at all, so even here they are far from guaranteed.

### **Cape Hare *Lepus capensis***

Cape Hares were seen whilst spotlighting at Yotvata on October 30 and October 31 (with one seen on each night).

### **Golden Spiny Mouse *Acomys russatus***

Two of these day-active mice were seen late morning at Masada on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica***

Another highlight! A minimum of seven (probably as much as 11) were seen on November 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory and the surrounding parks. At least four of those (including a female with her young) showed down at only a couple of feet in front of the hide of the Jerusalem Bird Observatory: brilliant! Three others were seen on the walk to and from our hotel to the observatory.



*Indian Crested Porcupine showing down to a few feet in front of the hide of the Jerusalem Bird Observatory, sometimes together with White-breasted Hedgehog.*