

So after an involuntary mammal watching session in my kitchen last week (with the only species being *MegaRattus uglyii*), I went on a small adventure with my American buddy Max Chiswick. It was a 1-nighter to see the onagers (Asiatic Wild Ass, reintroduced in Israel) of Borot Lotz in Har Hanegev (Negev Mountain) reserve area, and then continue to Mitzpe Ramon and Makhtesh Ramon (Ramon Crater) for the usual attempt at nocturnal desert carnivores...

Because of a late start, we only reached Har Hanegev around 10:30-11:00am. Before turning into Borot Lotz, I noticed some "donkey shit" on the main road, so I eye-balled scanned the open land as we drove through it, which luckily enabled me to spot an **Onager!** Boom, first target before we ever got out of the car. The onager was about 30-50m away from the road (don't remember exactly/difficult to tell

exact distances) and was clearly a collared individual. Once we reached Borot Lotz it was already past



11:30 and was super-hot outside. A 2.5-ish hour-long walk yielded no more animals, but according to a boyfriend-girlfriend couple in need of jump-start car cables who picked up back at the parking lot, they heard a large herd of onagers passing by at night. I wouldn't necessarily have believed their "sound-based" encounter had they not both worked for the Society for Nature Conservation in Israel, and were able to point out specific mammal, bird and tree species in the area.

After the short helping-peers-in-need episode (we didn't have jumpstart cables, but were able to give the couple a lift to where they had better phone reception), we continued onto Mitzpe Ramon for lunch, followed by descending to the crater and getting an air-conditioned room at the Be'erot campsite in the crater. For only 350NIS per room (3 2-story bunkbeds: up to 6 ppl) you get a small room right in the middle of the crater, away from the main road, with fully functioning air conditioning/heating, warm-ish water shower, bathroom and small kitchen area. Worth the price for a nice afternoon nap and subsequent nightstay. We left again at 18:45 further into the reserve (which you aren't allowed to visit after dark) and hiked the beginning of a trail, settling on top of a hill overlooking some open land in hopes of seeing some animals. We stayed there maybe 20 minutes after sunset but no luck. When it got a little too dark we hiked back 10 minutes to the car. We were the only people there since you're not allowed to be there. Lol. I already had a confident and assertive explanation prepared in case somebody "caught" us. There was a sign blocking the road just before reaching back to the campsite, which "closes" the road after dark, so we elegantly sneaked passed it as our car fit between the sign and the rock-marked edge of the gravel road. Nobody said anything.

At this point it was already dark, and so from the campsite until the main road (4ish km of gravel road) we "flash-lit" using my battery-devouring LED Lenser flashlight. We only saw 1 eye-shine which ended up being a very scared **Cape Hare**. You don't see any animals on the main highway through the crater, as there is constant traffic 24/7. But as we ascended back up the crater towards Mitzpe Ramon for dinner, a **canid** crossed the road then swiftly and effortlessly climbed up the cliffs. I was able to track it down with my flashlight through Max's passenger window, and it stared back down at us for a few seconds before passing cars violently honked at us to get moving. Both **Ruppell's** and **Blandford's** foxes exist in the area in small numbers, but my educated guess would say it was 99% a **golden jackal** based on size and face which we briefly saw. At the restaurant we asked where to see local **striped hyenas** and the waitress told us that closer to the star observatory (11min drive from Mitzpe Ramon center) one was hanging around and she's seen it a few times. But after a beer, a long, annoying stop at the gas station and then having to go back to the restaurant to grab the take-away we forgot there, it was already almost 11pm and we wanted to go back to the crater and flashlight our way back to the room, since we planned on waking up by 4:45am. So we skipped potential striped hyena and drove back down to the crater. We started flashlighting the excellent habitat right as we got off the main road, and picked up another **cape hare** and what I'm 85% sure was a **Dorca's Gazelle** (13% another onager, 2% Nubian Ibex) and made it back to our room before midnight. We thought we would have more luck pre-dawn because full moon was out. In retrospect we may have done better had we continued flashlighting back&forth on that gravel road between the main road and Be'erot campsite, since we were kind of on a role considering how little time we actually put in.

We were out again by 5:00 and took a gamble by pursuing a different gravel road which I'm not familiar with. Turns out this road doesn't go through as much open, flat habitat. Long-story short, it was already

starting to be light out and despite our best efforts we didn't see any animals. We had to be back in Tel Aviv by 9am, which means by 6am we were out on the main road.

The end.