

OMAN and UAE 2018 (JANUARY 15th-February8th)

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For the third time I travelled in Oman. I added UAE for only 2 days and a half. My main targets were Arabian Tahr, Blanford's Fox, Sand (Goitred) Gazelles and False Killer Whales.

During my last trip in Oman I expected to get a permit to visit Wadi Sarin Reserve where there is a good population of Arabian Tahrs. Unfortunately I never received any answer to my emails. In fact I know that you have to go to the office in Muscat to get the permit. In the past it was the same to visit Jaaluani (now Al Wusta Arabian Oryx Sanctuary). During 6 evenings I looked without success for Blanford Fox. A few months earlier I was in Israel and spent a lot of time looking for this species. But the fact you can't spotlight in this country or even walk or drive by night in a reserve does not help. I camped several times at good places but got always Desert Red Foxes (even in my car). And nevertheless Blanford's Fox has its highest density above the Ded Sea and in Eilath Mountains. They are not rare.

Last winter, just before leaving home to Oman I found an interesting report of Phil Gregory: he had seen an Arabian Tahr from the Mercure Hotel at Djebel Hafeet in UAE. It was decided I had to go there. It was nevertheless too late to add a visit at this place. A few months later Jon Hall went there and saw several Tahrs at this place. And during last summer Vladimir Dinets did the same.

Concerning the Sand (Goitred) Gazelle Jon Hall and Vladimir Dinets saw 1 or 2 in the Desert Conservation Area in UAE. It is a fenced area and as Jon says animals are half domesticated. They receive added food every day. Staying at this place is outrageously expensive. I was not tempted to visit on a tour with a travel agent. I had seen Arabian Oryx really wild in Oman and in Israel. Arabian Gazelles are not too difficult to see in Oman. Sand Gazelles may have disappeared as wild animals in UAE, but they are still present in the western part of Oman, near the border of Saudi Arabia. They may be very difficult to find. But in UAE they are many of them in closed reserves (like in the Desert Conservation Area): apparently more than 50000. I had to find a place to see them. I found on the net that they are several places where you can see them (plus Arabian Oryx and Arabian Gazelle in Dubai emirates). There is even a reserve (I suppose also fenced) near the border of Saudi Arabia and Oman where there are Arabian Oryxes, Sand Gazelles and Arabian Gazelles. I had not enough time to go there. The name is Um Al Zamool.

False Killer Whales have been seen several times on pelagic off Mirbat in Oman (see Mammalwatching and Birdquest).

2018 TRIP

-UAE

I began with a 2 days and a half in UAE. I spent nearly all my time at Djebel Hafeet. Half an hour after I arrived at the highest car park I saw for a short time an Arabian Tahr at the summit of the mountain (which seemed to be in Oman). I stayed until night, and was there the 2 following days early morning

and late afternoon but never saw one again. Jon had told me that you can easily enter the Mercure Hotel even you don't sleep there. I asked and was allowed to do it, but never saw anything except a birdwatcher from Belgium. Spotlighting in Djebel Hafeet is possible, but there is quite a lot of traffic by night. I saw a lot of feral cats either at this place or at the Green Mubazzarah and nothing else.

During my last day in UAE between 11h and 16h I drove way and back between Al Ain and Dubai to check the places between Bab al Sham and Truck Road where antelopes have been reintroduced. I knew it was the worst time of the day to do that. And by the end I had no time to look for animals. But I soon I was driving back to Al Ain, I saw 3 males Sand Gazelles in a beautiful area of the desert (but of course fenced).

-OMAN

I spent 3 weeks in Oman, mammalwatching by night and birdwatching by day. I stayed mainly in the south in Djebel Samhan (where Blanford's Fox has been camera-trapped) and Djebel al Qatar. I missed again Blanford's Fox. I knew a trail between 2 levels of cliffs in Djebel Saman which is a good area for this fox. I found fox scats there. But it is very difficult to find this species in a place like this, because you rarely see far, and it is dangerous (I fell down and am lucky to be still alive). Spotlighting from a viewpoint or along a road is easier in this habitat. The road to Djebel Al Qatar is an easy place to spotlight but there is a lot of traffic in the early evening. Same the road in the east part of Djebel Saman is a good easy place, with nearly no traffic. I did a pelagic, but saw neither a False Killer Whale, nor any Dolphin.

In the south I saw:

-Arabian Gazelles: 3 east of Mudday (in the large wadi between Thumrait and Mudday). Again like last years I saw plenty of droppings and footprints at Muntasar oasis, and also west of Ash Shuwaymiyyah.

-Nubian Ibex: 4 Al Mughsail.

-Red Fox: 2 Djebel al Qattar, 1 west Thumrait, 1 Muntasar Oasis, 1 eastern part of Djebel Saman, another heard in the same mountain.

-Arabian Wolf: 3 by night lower parts of Djebel Saman between Tawai Attair and Wadi Darbat.

-Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins: several at different places between Salalah and Al Mughsail.

-Pacific (inshore) Bottle-nosed Dolphins: 4 west Ash Shuwymiyah.

-Rock Hyrax: 8 Djebel Saman.

-Egyptian Roussette: several picking up fruits on a fig-tree in Wadi Darbat.

-Gerbil sp: 1 Ayn Tobrok

-Arabian Pipistrelle: probably this species at wadi al Mughsail and wadi Darbat.

In the center:

-Cap Hare near Duqm

- Brown Rat :1 Masirah island.

In the north:

I spent 2 evenings in wadi Muaydin in Djebel Al Akhdar:

The first night I heard 1 owl. The second (my last night in the country) I saw finally a Blanford's Fox. It was high in the wadi and it took me a lot of time to know what it was. After a lot of pishing it descended and was a little closer. The long furry black tipped tail was impressive. I remember of a trip report of somebody who saw one and said "what a tail". And it is true. This animal was very agile, running and climbing rocks. Unfortunately a car passed in the wadi and it began to climb again. It was still visible, but the strong wind and orange sky made me afraid of a storm. I know this area is dangerous when it rains. And as I have experienced that in Morocco and Oman I am very carefull of that now. Rain is extremely dangerous in the desert. In total between Israel and Oman I had spent more than 20 evenings looking for this species in Oman and Israel.

I saw also:

Arabian Gazelles: at least 122 near Dibbab and Bama in a reserve. It is south of Qurayat.

Desert Red Fox: 1 in the wadi close to Dibbab.

On my last morning I stopped between Nizwa and Muscat to scan Djebel al Akhdar and a local told me they are Arabian Thars (Wahal al Arabi) at this place and he knew different trails to climb in the mountain. I have his contact.

In the full country feral cats are very common.

Finally I just can say that Oman is a must for mammalwatchers as you can spotlight without being disturbed. The country seems very safe and most people are glad to greet you and to offer their help, without expecting anything. It is also very good for birdwatching.

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