

Oman



February - March
2017

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25th February - 10th March
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By Stig Jensen and Jon Lehmborg

Whereas Oman is a very popular destination among birders, mammal watchers have never truly embraced the country in the same way apparently. Perhaps that's not really surprising, given the fact that the Indian subcontinent to the East and Africa to the Southwest seems to have so much more to offer. However, we think that it would be wrong to neglect Oman all together, since it's quite safe, easy and cheap to go there, the infrastructure is well developed, the scenery is stunning in many places and there are in fact lots of interesting mammals to be found. A more comprehensive report on our trip, can be found on Cloudbirders: <https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/show/19846/29296>

During our trip we managed to compile a respectable list of 14 mammal species seen, not counting a number of unidentified bats, and bearing in mind that this was primarily a birdwatching trip, we were quite content with that result. A trip more focused on mammals would surely have yielded an even longer list, and we're not just talking about a host of bats and rodents either. Such interesting species as Blanford's Fox, Grey wolf, Caracal, Leopard, Nubian Ibex, Arabian Tahr and Humpback Whale can all be seen in different parts of the country, though some of them are, of course, very difficult to find. Some might find it surprising that Oman is a very good place for cetaceans, but it is. Boat trips can be organised from both the north coast (Muscat) and in the southeast (Salalah and Mirbat), but by using a good telescope, it's also possible to see a number of whale and dolphin species from land, just like we did with some success.



African Grass Rat - Wadi Darbat.

Mammal list

Arabian Spiny Mouse (*Acomys dimidiatus*)

- 7/3 1 Wadi Darbat.

Seen by the carpark where the road ends.

African Grass Rat (*Arvicanthis niloticus*)

- Common in the wadis east of Salalah.

Common Genet (*Genetta genetta*)

- 7/3 1 Wadi Darbat.

Seen very well sitting in one of the small trees. However, when we tried to approach the animal, to get an even better view, it mysteriously disappeared into the night. There must have been some sort of hole it could hide in, though we couldn't actually see it - strange!

Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris*)

- 4/3 1 Ayn Hamran.

"Our" cat was a spitting image of the one pictured on the Eriksen website - www.birdsoman.com - from Wadi Darbat. While it certainly looked the part, the question raised by Dominique Brugiere in his report, on Mammalwatching.com, is still valid: Do they even occur in this part of Oman? We saw lots of domestic cats, both at Ayn Hamran and particularly at Wadi Darbat, and they all looked quite different in both build and colours than this one.

Striped Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*)

- 4/3 1 Ayn Hamran.

First seen briefly but well skulking inside the shrubbery, while spotlighting near the carpark. After failing to relocate it here, we tried to intercept it on the other side and succeeded spectacularly. Here we saw this lone animal really well at close range before it retreated quietly into bushes. Our only regret was that we didn't get any photos despite the close encounter. This is a really cool species and always a pleasure to see. Grey Wolf (*C. lupus*) is another predator which is actually seen and/or heard much more often in this area, but we didn't have any luck with that particular species.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

- Common in the north and around Mudday in the south.

Of course, we checked each individual carefully, hoping for one of the other fox species, but sadly we didn't find any. Both Rüppell's Fox and Blanford's Fox can be found in Oman, but are, of course, much less common than their red cousin.

Honey Badger (*Mellivora capensis*)

- 7/3 2 Wadi Darbat.

Seen very well together approximately 1,5 kilometres before the last car park. When we first caught their eye-shine, we thought it was just another couple of domestic black cats, but when we found them in our binoculars there was no doubt. We were really pleased to be able to follow these cool mammals for several minutes.

Egyptian Fruit Bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*)

- Common and widespread even in sparsely vegetated areas.

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*)

- 4/3 15-20 Ras Janjari.

One pod slowly moving east together.

Long-beaked Common Dolphin (*Delphinus capensis*)

- 5/3 20 Raysut Lighthouse.

Seen very well from the lighthouse. At first, they were pretty far out (so to speak), but they gradually moved closer to the shore, and finally came within a few hundred meters from where we were standing, while putting on quite a show.

Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*)

- 4/3 85 Ras Janjari.

One large pod moving quickly westwards, often jumping out of the water.

Indo-Pacific Humpbacked Dolphin (*Sotalia chinensis*)

- 8/3 6 Mughsayl Beach.

Seen very well as close as 50-100 metres from the shore, where they were moving slowly east just beyond the surf.

Arabian Gazelle (*Gazella arabica*)

- 6/3 1 Salalah - Thumrait.

- 6/3 6 Mudday.

The first animal was seen by the Salalah - Thumrait Highway at night, and the other ones in the two first wadis east of Mudday. Apparently, the taxonomy of this complex is still contested.

Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis*)

- 7/3 6 Jabal Samhan.

Seen almost at the very edge of the scarp, a couple of hundred metres west of the radio mast. Very shy animals which we only caught a fleeting glimpse of. Mind you, who wouldn't be a bit jumpy if your next-door neighbours, Mr and Mrs *Aquila Verreauxii*, were constantly trying to kill you.



Red Fox - Mudday.



Arabian Gazelle - Mudday & Arabian Chameleon - Ayn Hamran.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please feel free to contact either Stig on sej@primoris.dk or Jon on jon.lehmberg@gmail.com