

Antalya, Türkiye – 2-17 April 2024

by Andrey, Karina and Toby



Taurus ground squirrel at the Alacabel Zirve

In April 2024 we travelled to Antalya, Türkiye for a conference and of course decided to add some wildlife watching to the trip. Based on reports from mammalwatching.com and inaturalist.com, we put together a simple itinerary without a lot of travelling, but managed to find nine species of mammals, 76 species of birds, five species of reptiles and one species of amphibian. The locals were extremely friendly, especially in the villages, while the shepherds' dogs, which look intimidating, proved to be extremely calm and friendly without causing any problems. Except of Antalya City and Alacami village we slept in a

campervan in the wild and never had any problems. Travelling by campervan (or regular car and a tent) is a great way to explore the area as hotels are often very limited or absent in the most interesting areas while picturesque locations for wild camping are abundant.

First, in Antalya city, we visited the [Upper Düden Şelalesi waterfall](#), popular with holidaymakers, to find a grotto with a small colony of **Egyptian fruit bats** (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*). As you approach the waterfall, go down to the right and then along the river in the rock wall where you will see the sign with the silhouette of a bat and a grotto with pipes (you will need a torch!). On the roof of this grotto you will see the colony. We have not found any microbats in the caves and crevices of the park.





Egyptian fruit bats at the Upper Düden Şelalesi waterfall park

Second, we explored the forest and olive groves near the Alacami village (you can stay at the [Serai Stone House](#)). The tiny settlement on the edge of the forest in this area is quite dry and heavily thinned by logging, but still has a preserved fauna of the pine forests of the region. Unfortunately there is a lot of hunting pressure here, with spent bullet casings everywhere. In the nearby plantation downhill we found our first **Persian squirrel** (*Sciurus anomalus*), while a night walk - also in the olive plantation - with a smartphone thermal camera (Seek Thermal Compact) revealed a lonely **Southern white-bellied hedgehog** (*Erinaceus concolor*). The forest and small meadows here are good for birding too, with Cretzschmar's bunting (*Emberiza caesia*), Finsch' wheatear (*Oenanthe finschii*), Rüppels warbler (*Curruca ruppeli*) and middle spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocoptes medius*) to mention. Pine forest has lots of spur-thighed tortoises (*Testudo graeca*) and rough-tail rock agamas (*Stellagama stellio*), while on the tree in the settlement we were happy to find a Mediterranean chameleon (*Chamaeleo chamaeleon*). In the ponds and forest streams we also found calling Levant water frogs (*Pelophylax bedriagae*).



Southern white-bellied hedgehog at the olive groves near Alacami

Then we visited the [Manavgat river mouth](#), a popular birding spot with lots of spring migrants and resident specials. The area does indeed have many birds with the Eurasian thick-knee (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), little crake (*Zapornia parva*), masked (*Lanius nubicus*) and woodchat shrike (*L. senator*), graceful prinia (*Prinia gracilis*), Cetti's (*Cettia cetti*) and barred warbler (*Curruca nisoria*) to name a few. Shrub birds were away from the river and many gathered on the trees near the houses (e.g., 36.755477700366235, 31.468579938263822), especially fruiting trees. Unfortunately, we did not have a chance to spotlight in the evening due to the field trucks and tractors activity at that day. However, the exploration of footprints at the dirt road revealed a fresh Caucasian badger (*Meles canescens*), and according to locals, the golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) is also seems possible in these wetlands. The site has a nice [camping and caravan parking](#) (400 liras for two persons) with an easy access to the stony beach (watch out for waders migrating along the shore!).

The next area we explored was the so-called Akseki area (also popular with birders). Besides mountain birds, our main target here were, of course, the **Taurus ground squirrel** (*Spermophilus taurensis*).

Even though we actively searched many known sites in the fields near the Dutluca and Belenalan-Bucakalan villages, no ground squirrels or fresh burrows were found. We've read that this sciurid can still hibernate in April, but we were still hoping that this year's unusually early spring would wake them up earlier. In addition, the locals said that they were actively fighting pests, but they did not specify how and which ones... Surprisingly, further up, at the Alacabel Zirve aka Alacabel Pass, we found ground squirrels in small alpine meadows near resting and viewing spots (down from the car parks) on the right side when driving from Akseki. At [37.173483564399874, 31.928978094690365](https://www.google.com/maps/place/37.173483564399874,31.928978094690365) we noticed a pair of rodents chasing each other in rocks, which appeared to be the **European snow voles** (*Chionomys nivalis*).



Alacabel Zirve area with ground squirrel meadows indicated



Alacabel Zirve



Taurus ground squirrels at the Alacabel Zirve



European snow vole at the Alacabel Zirve

The cliffs here were also great for mountain birds with the gray-necked bunting (*Emberiza buchanani*), rufous-tailed rock thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) and fire-fronted serin (*Serinus pusillus*) to mention. Back in Akseki, at the cemetery we found another **Persian squirrel** at 37.044985, 31.794721, and an outrageous number of tortoises feeding on flowers by the graves. In the famous Çimiköy valley the best place for the birds was near a stony goat trough at 37.01675552184473, 31.871735853645987, which may also be good for some mammal activity in the summer months. Birds of note at this spot included western rock nuthatch (*Sitta neumayer*), Rüppell's warbler (*Curruca ruppeli*), Finsch's wheatear (*Oenanthe finschii*) and Cretzschmar's bunting (*Emberiza caesia*) among many others.

Thanks to the reports on mammalwatching.com we decided to try to find the **bezoar ibex** (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus*) near the Üzümdere village and luck was on our side! On two mornings and one evening (which we spent there) we were able to find these wild goats (two different groups - of three and of seven - on the slopes at the daylight. Slow driving/walking along the riverside road (gravel road in a good condition, drivable by any car) from 37.144563688486514, 31.71720204898648 to 37.155125320242206, 31.72258253412859 (most vertical cliffs in the area). You should look for the goats on both sides of the river.





Bezoar ibex near the Üzümdere village

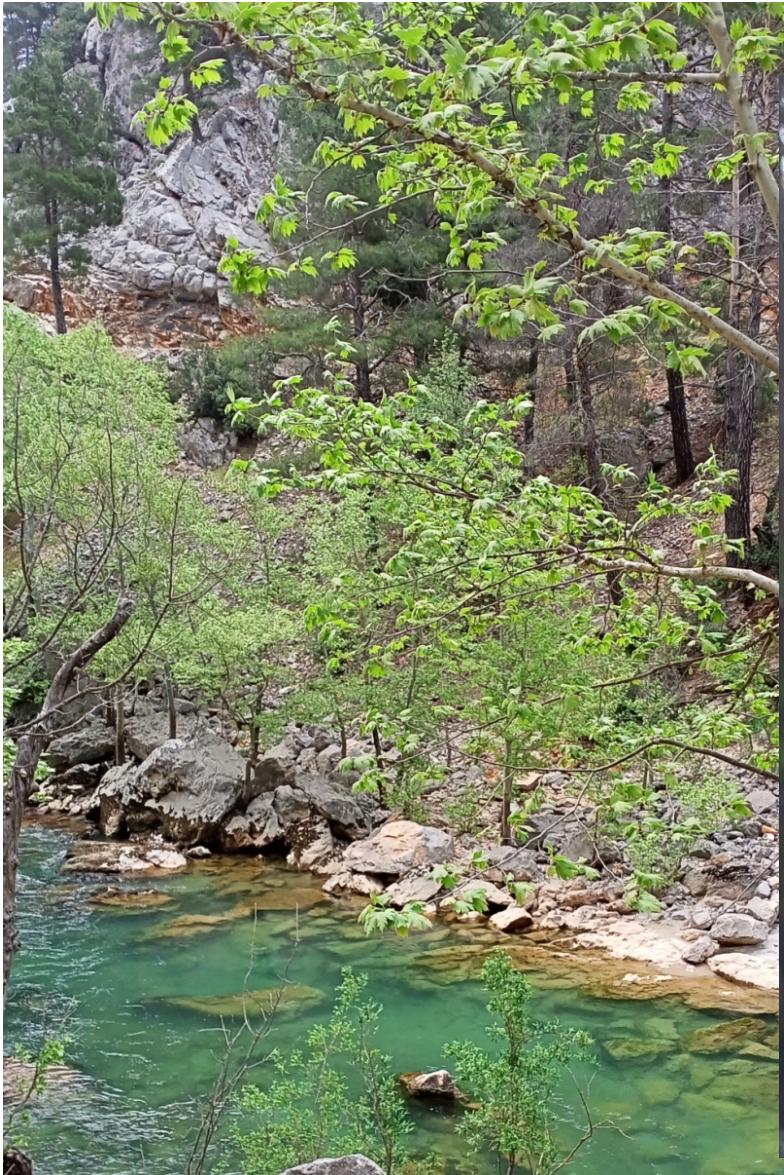
The goats were seen in around 8:00 AM in the morning and half an hour before dusk in the evening. Surprisingly, no goats were found by thermalling at early night, but we did find nimble the **eastern broad-toothed field mouse aka rock mouse** (*Apodemus mystacinus*) leaping with ease over steep cliffs. The campsite at 37.10318766118962, 31.680033642370827 is actively used by locals at weekends, but is nicely situated by the crystal clear waters of the river. Here, on a plane tree was our best sighting of the Krüper's nuthatch (*Sitta krueperi*). Another **Persian squirrel** showed up nicely at 37.10121592007959, 31.67744022918409 as we walked along the road in the morning. The road on the opposite side of the Manavgat River looks good for spotlighting and is also drivable (though not as well maintained and cleared of fallen rocks as the one on the Üzümdere side).



Eastern broad-toothed field mouse at the Manavgat River



Persian squirrel at the Manavgat River



The Manavgat River



Scanning for the bezoar ibex

Finally, we decided to check out the cave called [Karataş Mağarası](#). From the Google Maps reviews we've found that there have been some bats here at least a few years ago. It's a 30-40 minute drive from Antalya and easily accessible through a traditional village. The entrance fee is 60 TL for adults. On the day we arrived it was closed due to a funeral, but the villagers advised us to ask in the house opposite where their relatives lived. Luckily, the owners were there and kindly let us in. The length of this sandy cave is about 210m, there is lighting (but take a torch for the bats), there is a metal path, generally accessible to all ages, damp but not slippery. Near the end, we've found bats! There were lonely individuals of the **lesser mouse-eared bat** (*Myotis blythii*) and the **common bent-wing bat** (*Miniopterus schreibersii*), as well as a colony with two species together, but dominated by *M. blythii*. On the way there, we explored the Kurşunlu Şelalesi Tabiat Park for any bat signs – to no avail, but were greeted by yet another **Persian squirrel** right in the car park at 37.002908243309776, 30.817425895904968.



Lesser mouse-eared bat and the common bent-wing bat at the Karataş Mağarası.



Lesser mouse-eared bat and the common bent-wing bat colony at the Karataş Mağarası.

Many thanks to Prof. Dr. Atilla Arslan (Selcuk University) for confirming the bat ID and Prof. Dr. Yiğit (Ankara University) for confirming the vole ID.

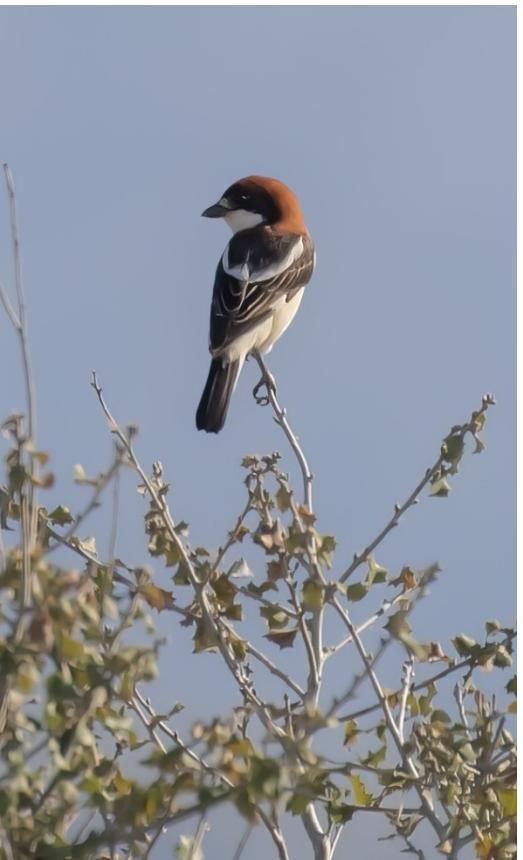
Non-mammal sightings:



*Little crake at the
Manavgat river mouth*



Masked shrike, Manavgat river mouth



Woodchat shrike, Manavgat river mouth



*Krüper's
nuthatch at the
Manavgat River*



Cretzschmar's
bunting,
Çimiköy valley



Mediterranean chameleon near Serai
Stone House



Spur-thighed tortoise, pine forests at the Alacami area