

OMAN

3 - 16 DECEMBER 2021

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Caracal

Photo LP

It was a combined bird- and mammalwatching trip with Striped Hyaena and Omani Owl as the most wanted targets. Despite a lot of effort, we did not manage to see any of them, but when we tried, we got a lot of other good stuff.

Charles Hood and Mike Richardson visited Oman in December of that year, so much information is already covered in their report. This will be some repetition but hopefully there are some additional useful tips.

Travelling to Oman

Due to the current situation with covid restrictions changing all the time, we booked the flight only three weeks in advance. One week before our flight, the corona variant omicron appeared and the world began to lock down again. Luckily it did not affect us. Upon check-in in Copenhagen, the most convenient airport from southern Sweden, we had to show proof of covid vaccination, PCR test, E-Visa, insurance covering 30 days of treatment for covid and a hotel booking.

We arrived in Muscat early in the morning and unlike the experiences of Charles Hood and Mike Richardson, everything went smoothly and we got our Landcruiser from Europcar. Normally we rent smaller cars but this time it was worth the money to have a big 4WD that allowed us to go where we wanted.



Camels are everywhere

Photo AE

Equipment

Since most days were very hot, 26 – 30 degrees C, and there were rocks everywhere, still hot at night, it was very tiring to use the thermal scope. In fact, we did not see a single animal other than camels and donkeys using it. Instead, we used flashlights and caught the eye shine. In some cases, when we got close to houses with cows and camels around, the residents turned on very strong spotlights and we found it best to return.

Even if you can not choose Oman or Arabia in the country selection on the bat detector Echometer Touch 2 app, and most bat species from Oman are missing, I still thought it was of some use. I set it up in "Europe" and saved the recordings. EMT2 suggested the most likely bat from Europe and I compared the recordings with closely related bats found in the right area and habitat in Oman. Only recordings of bats that were seen so we had an idea of the size and behavior were used. Maybe too naive and frivolous?

We brought a scope and used it to scan some slops for Arabian Thar and for cetaceans in the sea without results. But it was necessary to be able to find Rock Hyrax in Jabal Samhan. Another useful thing was to buy an Omani SIM card. We had many problems with the maps.me app which usually works perfectly for navigation. After downloading the map of Oman, the map and all our points disappeared sometimes, but with the new sim card we could use google maps instead.



Lovely Omani ladies offered us coffee and traditional sweets at Dolphins Beach Photo AE

Mammal locations

We used trip reports from mammalwatching and cloudbirders, and checked sightings in eBird and iGoTerra when we planned the itinerary and where we were going. Some of the birding spots were difficult to reach due to fences, gates or the need for permits, but our selected spots for mammal watching worked out fine.

Wadi al Muaydin 23.004725, 57.670687

Located southwest of Muscat in the western Hajar Mountains not far from the city of Nizwa. Among birders, it is famous as a site for Omani Owl, for mammal watchers perhaps more for Blanford's Fox. There is also a cave with Small Mouse-tailed Bats (look out for Fan-footed Geckos – *Ptyodactylus orlovi* in the same cave).

We saw: Blanford's Fox, Red Fox, Small Mouse-tailed Bat, Geoffroy's Horseshoe Bat.

Wadi Darbat 17.09901, 54.451066

Situated between Salalah and Mirbat, northeast of Taqah, signposted from Route 49. Definitely our favorite in Oman and visited for four nights. On our first visit, the park-like environment with paved roads, parking lots, picnic areas and a café surprised us. Not quite the wilderness we had expected, given all the sightings of larger predators made in the area. It is a good place for Arabian Eagle Owl which we saw two of.

We saw: Caracal, Grey Wolf, Indian Crested Porcupine, Common Genet, Dhofar Pipistrelle, Feral Cat.

Ayn Hamran 17.097640, 54.281080

Located between Salalah and Taqah, north of Dharbub.

It is a recreational place with a spring. Around the parking lot are Arabian Scops Owl and Arabian Chameleon. A small road to the left leads to a farm. When spotlighting in that direction someone lit a strong spotlight on us so we found it was better to leave. To the left before the farm is a cave that we visited during daytime and found Arabian Sheath-tailed Bats.

We saw: Common Genet, Red Fox, Arabian Sheath-tailed Bat, Dhofar Pipistrelle and heard Grey Wolf.

Jabal Samhan 17.101959, 54.697386 (radio mast)

A huge nature reserve northeast of Mirbat. We just visited the area around the radio mast in search of Rock Hyrax and drove back towards Salalah in the dark, looking for wildlife. The edge of the mountain is a wellknown place for Verreaux's Eagle.

We saw: Grey Wolf, Red Fox, Common Rock Hyrax.

Taqah Cliff 17.031785, 54.409930

East of Taqah along Route 49. It is a great place to look for cetaceans.

We saw: Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin.

Dolphins Beach 17.265799, 55.242726

Maybe 100 km east of Mirbat along Route 49.

We saw: Bottlenose Dolphin

Mirbat pelagic 16.987100, 54.686098 (Mirbat harbour)

Hatem organizes pelagic tours from Mirbat for bird watching, whale watching and fishing.

E-mail say_ary@hotmail.com (it is an underscore after y), mobile +968 9908 8815, he seems to prefer WhatsApp. Pick up at the harbour. We paid 50 OMR for two persons. False and Pygmy Killer Whale are possible.

We saw: Sperm Whale, Spinner Dolphin, Common Dolphin.

Wadi Banawt 17.614554, 53.465686

Situated along road Route 45 between Thumrayt and Mudday. There are three wadis on that stretch and the one closest to Thumrayt seems to be the best for Arabian Gazelle. But after reading Jan Ebr's report from 2019-2020 about being rejected from the wadi by the military, we instead tried the second, middle, not far from Mudday, and in the evening we found two gazelles when spotlighting.

We saw: Arabian Gazelle.

Wadi Ashawk 16.900092, 53.768226

About 40 km west of Salalah along Route 47. On the other side of the road there is a good wetland for birds.

We saw: Grey Wolf, Red Fox.

We also drove the same small road further west where Jan Ebr had a Striped Hyena on his trip. No larger mammals but lots of bats.

We saw: Desert Pipistrelle.



Muntasar Oasis in the middle of nowhere

Photo AE



Caracal cub, Wadi Dabat

Photo LP



Common Genet, Wadi Dabat

Photo LP



Blanford's Fox, Wadi al Muaydin

Photo LP



Red Fox, Jabal Samhan

Photo LP



Small Mouse-tailed Bat, Wadi al Muaydin

Photo LP



Arabian Sheath-tailed Bat, Ayn Hamran

Photo LP



Sperm Whale, Mirbat pelagic

Photo LP



Common Dolphin, Mirbat pelagic

Photo LP



Spinner Dolphin, Mirbat pelagic

Photo LP



Bottlenose Dolphin, Dolphins Beach

Photo LP



Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin, Taqah Cliff

Photo LP



Arabian Eagle-Owl – *Bubo milesi*, Wadi Darbat



Arabian Chameleon – *Chamaeleo arabicus*, Ayn Hamran

Photo LP

Photo AE

Species list

Taxonomi follows mammalwatching's checklist from Januari 2021.

1 Common Rock Hyrax *Procavia capensis* 17.101959, 54.697386

After some effort, we finally found one on a cliff south of the radio mast in Jabal Samhan.

2 Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica* 17.071844, 54.444412

One crossed the road at the beginning of Wadi Darbat.

3 Caracal *Caracal caracal* 17.095444, 54.448869

Highlight of the trip!! A mother with a half-grown cub was seen in Wadi Darbat for more than half an hour. When we looked at the cats, we heard the wolves howling and saw them coming out on the road 200 meters away. The Caracals did not seem to care.

Lifer and cat species no. 22.

4 Common Genet *Genetta genetta*

One in Ayn Hamran near the parking lot. Seen three nights along the road in Wadi Darbat, 2+2+1. Hard to see well as they hide in the tree canopy.

5 Grey Wolf *Canis lupus*

We had expected to see at least one as they seem to be quite common in southern Oman, but were surprised to have ten in eight different locations. Wadi Ashawq 2, Wadi Darbat first night (same night as the Caracals) 1+2+1, Wadi Darbat the second night 1, the road between Jabal Samhan – Taqah 1+1+1.

6 Blanford's Fox *Vulpes cana* 22.981164, 57.669779

One at night in Wadi al Muaydin. In the beginning of the wadi, halfway up the mountain on the left side (when entering the wadi).

7 Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Very common except in Wadi Darbat. 22 ex in total. Seen in Ghubra, Wadi al Muaydin, Muntasar oasis, Wadi Ashawq, Ayn Hamran, Jabal Samhan and along the road Jabal Samhan – Taqah.

8 Arabian Gazelle *Gazella arabica* 17.614554, 53.465686

Two seen at night in Wadi Banawt. This is the second (middle) wadi along Route 45 between Mudday and Thumrayt.

9 Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

Some seen on a pelagic trip from Mirbat.

Lifer and new family.

10 Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis*

A large flock together with Spinners on the pelagic trip from Mirbat. It used to be *Delphinus*

capensis, but after the two common dolphins were lumped together into one species, it is now *D. delphis*.

11 Spinner Dolphin *Stenella longirostris*

A large flock together with Common Dolphins on the pelagic trip from Mirbat.

12 Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin *Sousa plumbea* 17.031785, 54.409930

A few from Taqah Cliff.

13 Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* 17.265799, 55.242726

A small group close to shore at Dolphins Beach.

14 Small Mouse-tailed Bat *Rhinopoma muscatellum* 22.95508, 57.66725

About ten in an easily accessible cave at the beginning of Wadi Muaydin. Thanks to the coordinates in Jan Ebr's report, it was easy to find.

Lifer and new family.

15 Arabian Sheath-tailed Bat *Coleura gallarum* 17.096229, 54.276587

In a cave near Ayn Hamran. Recently split from African Sheath-tailed Bat – *Coleura afra*. Lifer.

16 Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*

Detected with Echometer Touch 2 a few times and once seen in Ghubra.

17 Geoffroy's Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus clivosus* 22.993534, 57.665500

Seen flying a couple of times in Wadi al Muaydin.

Lifer.

18 Dhofar Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus dhofarensis*

Probably this species was seen flying in Ayn Hamran, Wadi Darbat and Taqah and was detected as Kuhl's Pipistrelle. The latter is missing from Oman except from the northern part. Dhofar Pipistrelle is a recently described species with a very small distribution from just inside Yemen to a little east of Mirbat.

Comments on this are warmly welcome!

19 Desert Pipistrelle *Hypsugo ariel* 16.857940, 53.735217

Probably this species which was seen flying in a rocky area along a small road north of Mughsail and which was detected as Common Pipistrelle – *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. A very small and agile bat and since Arabian Pipistrelle – *Hypsugo arabicus* only occurs in northern Oman, I can not see any other alternatives. But comments are very welcome!

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