

OMAN

1 month (December 2019 /January 2020)



Arabian Tahr

It was my fourth trip in Oman and as always I have enjoyed: nice people, wonderful scenery, ease to travel independently and of course good wildlife. As always the birding was excellent, but mammalwatching was exceptional with such species as **Arabian Tahr**, **Caracal**, **Honey Badger**, **Arabian Wolf**, **Striped Hyena** and **Blandford's Fox**.

I spent my first night in the north at **Wadi Al Muyaidin** where I found a **Blandford's Fox** during my last trip and again I saw it at the same place, but it was extremely shy this time. Then I drove to **Muntasar**, a kind of oasis in the center of Oman: I saw several **Desert Red Fox** and an **Arabian Gerboa**, plus a few footprints of gazelles. The following night I slept near **Qitbit** a place quite close where **Rüppel's Fox** has been said common. I saw only **Desert Red Fox**. During my full trip I never saw any **Rüppel's Fox**, but everywhere **Desert Red Fox** (a lot of them have black underparts, from the neck to the tail). **Desert Red Fox** are very different from their counterparts from Europe or elsewhere (slimmer, paler with larger ears) and what I think also confusing is the size of **Rüppel's Fox**. **Rüppel's Fox** are said to be smaller than Red Fox and all of those I have seen in Western Sahara were smaller (see for example the Handbook of Mammals of the world). By the contrary they are said to have the same size of Red Fox in Mammals of Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. I think it is

wrong. By my experience I think that **Rüppel's Fox** is declining in Oman (something which is mentioned in the literature for places like Arabian Oryx Sanctuary), but also in UAE due to competition with Red Fox which has invaded Arabia, following roads and human settlements. In Israel it is the same and it is on the verge of extinction. I am afraid it will be the same in the Western Sahara with new settlements along a road very busy now. **Rüppel's Fox** was said to be present near Oued Massa in Morocco, but now I think they are only **Red Foxes**. I hope I am wrong.

But I continue my report. After **Qitbit** I went to **Mudday** where I saw only **Red Foxes**, then to **Al Mughail** and wadi **Aswhak** with again **Red Fox** (one had not the black underparts) and a cooperative **Wagner's Gerbil**, but this year no **Nubian Ibex** even after 3 attempts. The place was very disturbed with several bedouin's camps, driving day and night and using strong spotlight I think to check if there was no predators (it was the time young camels are born). **Three Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins** were close to the shore.

In **Wadi Darbat** during 4 or 5 evenings I saw a **Striped Hyena** by 23h, 2 **Red Foxes** and got 4 sightings of **Common Genets** (at least 2 different). In **Ain Hamran**: 2 **Red Foxes** and a **Common Genet**. In **Ain Shaboon** 1 **Common Genet**, and **Honey Badgers** (2 the first evening and 2 or 3 the second evening when I stayed 3 hours looking at them) and a **Caracal**. **Ayn Tabraq**: 1 Egyptian **Fruit Bat** with a fruit in the mouth.

In **Djebel Samhan** I saw 5 **Rock Hyraxes**.

Between **Mirbat** and **Sadah** there is a reserve for **Arabian Gazelle**. I was sent to **Soab** by a local: the 1st morning I saw 3 and the second at the different place 4 and an **Arabian Wolf**. Both time it was early morning. East of **Mirbat** there was a group of **Long beaked Common Dolphins**.

In **Wadi Ash Shumaymiyyab** only **Red Fox** and no **Nubian Ibex** (may be just the droppings and footprints of one very far upstream). It is a locality where they have been seen. After the second evening I had to leave due to the risk of flooding and I was right as the following days it was raining a lot and the desert was a swamp, driving was difficult due to flooding. I choose a safe place but was stuck there for 1 day and 2 nights.

Then I drove north along the coast stopping at different places, seeing only **Red Foxes**. Near **Finns** in the northeast in a reserve I saw many **Arabian Gazelles**. One morning I counted 70. By night I got **Arabian Fox** and a **White Tailed Mongoose**.

Again I returned to **Wadi Al Muyaidin**, but this time I saw only **Red Foxes**. One day I did a 6hours hike upstream from the village where there is water and where different locals told me it was possible to see **Arabian Tahr**. But the best is to start at the **Sayq Plateau** and walk downstream the wadi.

In **Djebel Sham** I didn't see anything interesting except 8 Lappet-faced Vultures....

But the best of all is the sighting of 2 Arabian Tahrs in the Western Hajar thanks to a local, Rashid. See his photos below.

To finish, I saw feral cats (spotted like a **Gordon's Cat** or black) at most places in the center or the south of the country. All of them behave like feral animals, approaching the car by night, generally not very shy, and often close to places where locals come to picnic and let their rubbish.

Dominique BRUGIERE