

Looking for the Fennec fox in Central and Northern Chad

Report by Els Slots

Introduction

This is a short report of my mammal encounters during a recent trip to Central and Northern Chad. In October 2022 I took part in a 'general interest' tour of the region, with a focus on the World Heritage Sites of the Ennedi Massif and the Ounianga Lakes. The 14-day round trip was flawlessly conducted by the Chadian-Italian company [SVS Tchad](#).

My mammal wish list included only 1 species: the cute but elusive Fennec fox.

Mammal sightings

Campsite in the Sahel, just beyond Oum Hadjer

It all started with a hare - either a Cape Hare or an African savanna hare. Apparently it "can be told apart by its distinctively grooved incisors", but this specimen did not bare those. It sat still however for 4 cars filled with tourists to take a photo. After comparing it with pictures of both species on the internet, I go for an **African savanna hare** ("a distinct rufous nape and ears that are longer than its head").



Ennedi

The Ennedi Massif is home to the famous Guelta d'Archei, a canyon with a permanent water source where camels are led to drink. Unfortunately, we did not see any of the 4(?) remaining Nile crocodiles there. But the area is good for other animals as well, as it is lush compared to its surroundings. **Rock hyrax** were seen by group members just outside the main canyon (as I had seen them many times before I did not bother to hike there in the mid-day heat).

Upon leaving the canyon, we noticed about a dozen **Patas Monkeys** on the rock cliffs. They looked at us cautiously from a distance.



Fortunately, on this day I was in the car with the driver with the eagle eyes. He first found us a small owl. And then spotted what he said was a Fennec fox! All others in my car saw it as they were looking at it directly, while I tried to find it with the viewfinder of my camera and failed miserably. The fox walked away before I got it into view. Looking back at the terrain, I think it might have been a different fox species. The fennec prefer much sandier surroundings.

Totally absent in this area were Barbary Sheep. They used to be abundant here, at least in 1939 when British military officer and writer Wilfred Thesiger explored this region and wrote his observations down in *A camel journey to Tibesti*. Hyenas were rare even then; in 2022 we only saw the foot prints of a striped hyena.

Bahr el Ghazel

The second good area with mammal life in Central and Northern Chad is the Bahr el Ghazel, a dry riverbed to the southwest of the Ennedi. As the name suggests, **Dorcas gazelle** are a common sight. We saw about 50, in groups of 10 or 20, running as gazelles do. The singer encountered them as well, as he wrote: "Dorcas gazelle were common here, and I shot several, for meat is a great luxury to these people." Hyenas and jackals are sometimes seen in this area as well.



Djourab

Further to the south, on the penultimate day of our tour and just beyond the fossil-rich area of the Djourab, the first car of our convoy suddenly stopped. A white head peeked out from the sand and scanned the surroundings showing its tall ears. Finally, the **Fennec fox**! And not one, not two, but even three of them. One ran away upon our arrival, the second one stood guard and the third mostly stayed in the den. They had chosen to construct their home right in the middle of the "road" (a series of sandy tracks).

This sighting for me was the cherry on the cake of what had been already a fantastic trip through the vast and varied landscapes of Chad, spiced with nomadic life.

And the foxes posed well for the photos....

