

A Rare sighting of a Caracal from Kutch, India

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CARACAL, MOMENTS BEFORE IT DISAPPEARED FROM VIEW

This is a brief note to report a very rare sighting of a **Caracal** from a thorn forest location in Kutch, northwest India in April this year. This sighting took place on 7th April, 2019 at around 0645, in the relative cool of the morning (temp in the early 20's C), on the brink of sunrise and under clear skies. The sighting occurred in undisturbed Tropical Thorn Forest (a predominant habitat type in the hills of Kutch), in hilly undulating terrain, with high ground interspersed with small ravines/gullies. The Caracal was first seen about 40m away, from a vehicle, on a faint trail, in open terrain, before disappearing behind thickets and onto lower ground, away from the line of sight. The sighting occurred within, approximately, 500m from a relatively busy main road, from where traffic noise could be heard. The entire sighting lasted less than a minute, but the animal did not appear unduly disturbed and moved away in an unhurried manner. There was an apparent abundance of Indian Peafowl (a significant potential prey for Caracal in these forests) in the vicinity of the sighting and we also recorded Indian Hare, Indian Gazelle, Wild Pig and Golden Jackal. There was a forest temple within a few hundred metres of the sighting, with an open water source. In a concerted effort at finding potential Caracal sites in Kutch, with the indispensable aid of local expert Mr. Jugal Tiwari of CEDO Birding, we were also able to locate spoor and gather local knowhow on Caracal presence in two other locations in this vast, but very interesting ecoregion. This sighting assumes particular significance, since the animal is nowhere common in India and most recent sightings are either recorded from Ranthambhore NP (with a high density of people looking in a relatively small area) and from the much vaster, less visited, Kutch. We believe, from this brief experience, that with appropriate effort, Kutch has the potential to become one of the hotspots for Caracal sightings in India.

Incidentally we also came across **Leopard** (another rarity here), **Indian and Desert Hedgehogs**, a **roost of Mouse-tailed bat sp.**, **Indian Porcupine**, **Jungle Cat**, **Golden Jackal**, **Indian Gazelle**, **Indian Hare** and various rodents in 5 nights/days of looking. Kutch can also be interesting for other mammals with regular sightings of **Asiatic Wild Cat**, **Indian and Desert Foxes** and sometimes, **Striped Hyena** known from here and a visit here can be easily combined with sites for **Indian Wild Ass**, **Leopard**, **Indian Wolf**, **Asiatic Lion** and **Blackbuck** in the broader region,

making for a very healthy mammal list in a 10 day to 3 week itinerary through the region. The region is already well known for its fantastic winter birdlife ,including several global rarities, and can hold the interest of any natural history enthusiast for its unique plant life, geological nuances, herpetofauna, invertebrate diversity and landscapes.

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Checklist of Mammals Seen

Leopard *Panthera pardus*

Caracal *Caracal caracal*

Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*

Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*

Indian Porcupine *Hystrix indica*

Indian Gerbil *Tatera indica*

Indian Jird *Meriones hurriane*

Indian Long-tailed Tree Mouse *Vandeleuria oleracea*

Lesser Bandicoot Rat *Bandicoota bengalensis*

Indian Hedgehog *Paraechinus micropus*

Desert Hedgehog *Hemiechinus collaris*

Indian Hare *Lepus nigricollis*

Mouse-tailed Bat sp. *Rhinopoma* sp.

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*

Indian Gazelle *Gazella bennettii*

Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*

Nomenclature as per Menon, V., 2014. A Field Guide to Indian Mammals. Hachette India. ISBN 978-93-5009-760-1

