

Mammals of Southwestern Turkey



The mammalian fauna of Southwestern Turkey has received little attention from the burgeoning ranks of worldwide mammal watchers. There are sensible reasons for this. There are no endemics larger than a mouse and though there's a wide range of species these can mostly be seen more easily elsewhere. Thick maquis dominated habitats make mammal watching day and especially at night, extremely difficult.

There is though a wide range of interesting species and for many their distribution in the area is poorly understood. Having moved here a few years ago I have been surprised for instance how widespread Wolves are. And realising that Caracals were living within a few hundred metres of my house was quite a pleasant shock.

This is neither a scientific paper nor a wildlife trip report. It is really just a summary of my observations,

mostly trap camera generated, over the past few years.

My observations are from trap cameras stationed within twenty kilometres of Kas and from occasional observations within a couple of hours drive in all directions from Kas. So the southern tip of Southwest Turkey roughly halfway between Dalaman and Antalya Airports.

A word about habitats. Coastally the region is mostly rocky, the land often rising sharply from the sea up to around 1000m. There are just a few coastal wetlands, mostly small, but one large system of dunes and river based around Patara. Coastally and on mountain slopes up to around 1000m the land is covered in maquis. Originally this would have been largely thermophilous oak forest and there are a few small remnants of this lovely habitat left. Pine Forest is dominant in large areas and tends to be open in the lower mountains but lower down it is often with a maquis understory. Higher still there's a broad belt of Cedar Forest from around 1100m to about 1800m. Above this there are considerable areas of open alpine and subalpine country with low tragacanthic steppe.



Though I haven't tried camera trapping the high areas I get the impression that these are rather poor in mammals. Tracks are not common in winter in the snow up there, and there's nowhere to hide from the large numbers of summer-grazing sheep and goats and their attendant humans and dogs. The maquis on the other hand and the pine forest has a relatively rich and abundant mammal fauna. The physical nature of the habitat means that its difficult for humans to penetrate.

There follows an annotated list of mammals of this area with notes about my understanding of their status. This is not an exhaustive list and as yet I have done little work on the rodents and bats.

White-breasted Hedgehog (*Erinaceus concolor*). Probably common everywhere and one of the animals you are most likely to encounter if out spotlighting as they come to gardens and are happy in open country.



Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*). In much of Turkey they are common enough and often associated with wetlands, river valleys and open country. They are found in the Patara complex but are otherwise scarce in the area. Occasionally noted in trap cameras in the maquis around my village I had thought of individuals passing through the area but shepherds comment that they are here all the time and sometimes it is they and not the Wolves taking especially young goats.

Wolf (*Lupus lupus*). I have recorded them in virtually all of the dozen or so trap camera locations I've used in the past four years. Some of those were in the lowest parts of the Cedar Forest on Assos Dagi at around 1200m, but mostly they have been in the maquis and pine forests around the village of Ahatli. The latter I've been watching for a while and there seems to be three animals with a single Wolf and two that always travel together occupying an area of approx 4 square kilometres westwards from my house. The local shepherds are fully aware of their presence as they lose goats to them regularly, perhaps ten or more a year. Mostly there is a resigned shrug of the shoulders about this but sometimes resentment builds and then attempted poisoning can be the result, this happening on our village a couple of years back when the unfortunate recipients of the tainted meat were two unlucky local dogs. The Assos population again seems to be just a few individuals.



There is nothing special about either of these habitats so I think that Wolves are thinly distributed throughout the region. They are very difficult to watch in these habitats and finding them at night in such thickly vegetated country is almost impossible. We have seen them very occasionally but chance sightings in the daytime



e.g. when one walked right past the house at breakfast time one morning!



Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). Widespread and common.

Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*). Difficult to see in maquis but they are here. We see them occasionally from the verandah.

Stone Marten (*Martes foina*). Widespread and common.

Badger (*Meles meles*). Reasonably common through the maquis zone though the population is much less dense than say a UK woodland.



Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*). I photographed one at Patara in one of the open areas of water by the ancient site recently and have previously seen tracks along the banks of the Esen River. Very little available habitat though so must be very scarce.

Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*). There is a small population along this coast. As I write one animal is visiting Kas harbour regularly but unpredictably and others are seen occasionally along the coast. Fisherman say the best place to look is the seaward shore of Kekova Island in November/December.

Egyptian Mongoose (*Herpestes ichneumon*). Very scarce. I've seen just the one. A night sighting along the coast road 10km west of Kas.

Striped Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*). No certain records but the habitat at Patara looks good and I have found tracks there that I thought looked like Striped Hyena and when circulated amongst friends and colleagues familiar with that species in India and in Kenya they agreed that they looked good for Striped Hyena.



Caracal (*Caracal caracal*). Trap cameras revealed a large male Caracal travelling up through a narrow ravine 800m west of the house on several occasions in late winter/early spring. Since then I've recorded possibly the same animal on a trap camera by a spring 250m from the house and also a youngster in the pine forest further down the valley. Studies have shown that

pine forest habitats in the Datça and Muğla areas northwest of here have good populations of Caracal and that areas of extensive pine forest (as there is in the valley below us) is a good habitat for this species. As with other species though they are probably easier to record in the pine forest than the Maquis so it may be that the animals we are seeing here might just as easily live in the maquis than the pine forest below. As they are an animal that doesn't appear to like trails catching them even on trap cameras requires a modicum of luck, though probably rare there may be more of them than we realise. One or two of the local shepherds were familiar with 'Vaşak' (lynx) and had even seen them.

Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*). I have seen no sign of this cat though it might occur around some of the inland lakes such as Avlan or at Patara. But as yet no evidence encountered.

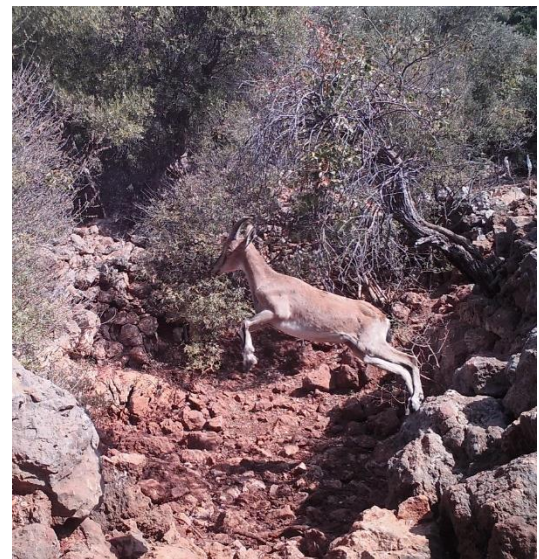
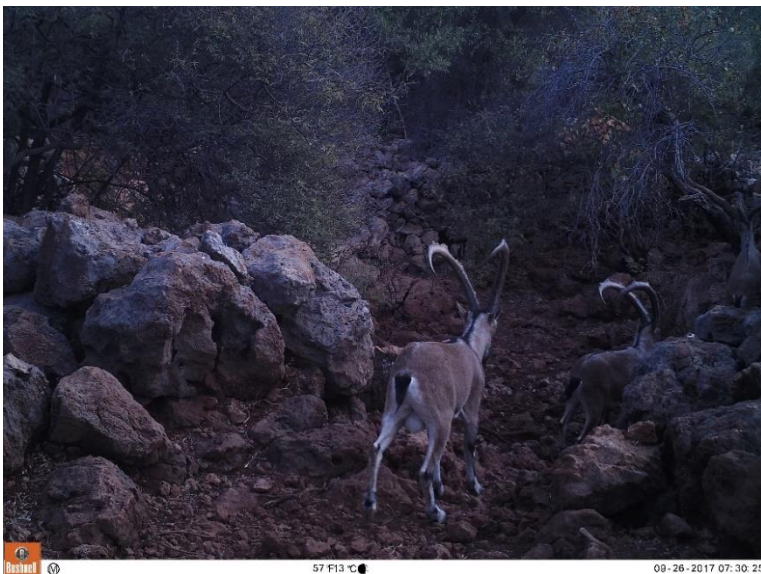


Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris*). Rather common. They are not so easy to see but nonetheless I've had plenty of day time sightings. Lots of pictures on trap cameras. As a general rule domestic cats though they can turn up anywhere are more typically tied to humanity here and my trap cameras more than 200m from the house never get pictures of them. In contrast the most 'remote' of my trap cameras get regular pictures of Wild Cats. However the Wild Cats certainly come close to and even into the villages. I've seen them just outside the house. And even visiting bins on the edge of the village. I have not yet found anywhere where sightings are likely in a regular basis. One cat hunts Water Rails and

Moorhens in a corner of the wetland at Andriake and with patience might be observed regularly. There's plenty of scope for hybridisation with many a kitten in the villages and even in Kas looking perfectly like a Wild Cat even though for instance in the village there are neither tabby males nor tabby females about! No obvious hybrids appearing on the trap cameras though.

Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*). Abundant. Villagers with unfenced wheat crops spend the whole of May trying to keep them out even sleeping next to their fields and with cordons of dogs and donkeys to try and keep them out. There's a certain amount of hunting to try and reduce numbers but I think the pigs are winning!

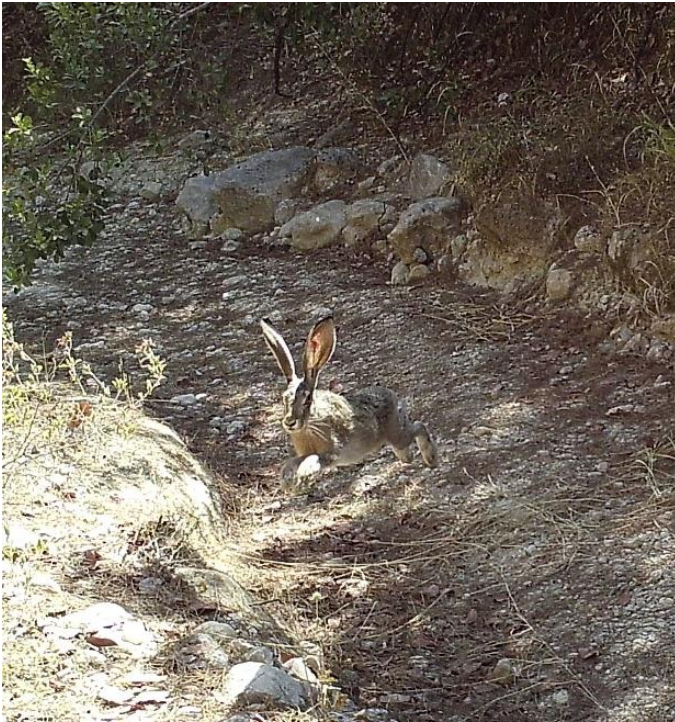
Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*). This species and **Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)** are both given as occurring in the region in field guides. I have seen no sign of either and not heard of anyone seeing them.



Wild Goat (Ibex) (*Capra aegagrus*). Locally common. They seem absent from many areas. There's a significant population along the coastal slopes even coming down to sea level. I know of canoeists who have seen them on rocks a metre above the sea just a couple of kilometres out of Kas. These coastal slope populations have movements that I am yet to understand. It seems they come into the seaward facing slopes from sea-level to 800m or so in June. This coincides with a movement to higher villages of the few people who live along this slope. The Ibex then stay through the hot summer months and into autumn at least until the start of November. There are salt licks in the area that they frequent throughout this season. Then they disappear. No idea where they go. Another population lives in the Kibris Çayı canyon. This canyon is virtually never visited by people and there is a large population of Ibex within it.

Persian Squirrel (*Sciurus anomalus*). Widespread and common.

Eastern Rock Mouse (*Apodemus mystacinus*). This is a fine little mouse. It has exceptionally large ears for the genus. Not easy to see but anywhere on those rocky coastal slopes would give a chance.



Nehring's Mole-rat (*Spalax nehringi*). I found one in some rubbish placed on the ground in a bag one night. This was in Yenikoy Village above Kas, 450m above sea level.

European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*). Common and widespread. Probably an important prey species for Caracal and Wolf.

Indian Crested Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*). Uncommon but reasonably widespread. Tied to areas where there is soft/sandy soil which are relatively infrequent in what is generally a hard limestone/marble environment. Good places to look for them include river flats in the Kasaba basin and Patara.

Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*). Origins of the local population? There are a few in the wetland at

Patara and also in the large reed bed at Adakoy in Ova north of Kalkan.