

Here is a quick trip report to Western Sahara that we visited twice in less than a year with the hope to see sand cats that we understood through various previous reports should not be so difficult to observe in the area between Dakhla and Aousserd. Due to vacation constraints we could only go there for short 3 nights / 4 days visits in May 2019 and then February 2020 considering the fact that it is pretty quick and straightforward to go there from where we leave in France.

We used both times the service of Nico from Dakhla Rovers to visit the area. Nico is very knowledgeable of the area and with his local driver don't hesitate to spend hours and hours for night drives, which we appreciated a lot. They also have access to a convenient and comfortable house in Aousserd, a clear plus to enjoy day time visits in the surrounding mountains and oueds for birding and long night drives in the core zone for mammal watching along the Aousserd road and Bougouffa trail. We even did the Bir Anzarane road but even so and although we saw many mammals during the two trips with nice views of African wild cats, fenneks (always very skittish though), Rueppel's foxes and even an African golden wolf...we could not see a single sand cat!!! I think we must be the only people in the world who spent 6 nights there without seeing the sand cat ☹️ So disappointing but well, that's life or should I say, that's wildlife ☺️ To be fair, it looks like we saw one on the first night during our first trip but it was only a glimpse of something running away from our car into the desert. Our guides were positive it was a sand cat but personally I could not distinguish anything specific so it doesn't count to me.

As a consequence, we will have to go there a third time but for more than 3 nights this time so as to maximize our chance to see one and defeat our bad luck... well if we can travel abroad again after the CoVid-19 crisis and the world is back to normal.

Below is the detailed list of what we could observe during these trips:

<b>Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)</b>				
<b>Species</b>	<b>Espèces</b>	<b>Latin Name</b>	<b>Where seen</b>	<b>Pic</b>
Desert Hedgehog	Hérisson du désert	Paraechinus aethiopicus	3 seen along the Aousserd road during our first trip – none during the second trip	X
Lesser mouse-tailed Bat	Petit rhinopome	Rhinopoma cystops	Several seen inside an abandoned house in Aousserd	X
African wild Cat	Chat sauvage	Felis libyca	3 seen very well along the Aousserd road and the Bougouffa trail during our 2 <sup>nd</sup> trip	X
African golden Wolf	Loup doré africain	Canis anthus	1 seen in the distance along the Bir Anzarane road	X
Rueppel's Fox	Renard famélique	Vulpes rueppellii	Several seen along the Aousserd and Bir Anzarane roads	X
Fennek	Fennec	Vulpes zerda	Several seen along the Aousserd road and in the Bougouffa trail, all very skittish	X
Maghreb Hares	Lièvre du Maghreb	Lepus mediterraneus	Quite common everywhere	X
Desert Jerboa	Gerboise du désert	Jaculus deserti	Several seen during both trips	X
Lesser Egyptian Gerbil	Petite gerbille d'Egypte	Gerbillus gerbillus	Very common everywhere	X
Fat-tailed Gerbil	Gerbille à queue grasse	Pachyuromys duprasi	Only one observed in the Bougouffa trail during our 2 <sup>nd</sup> trip	X
Camel	Dromadaire	Camelus dromedarius	Several herds observed along the Aousserd road	X
<b>Total Species Recorded = 11</b>				
<b>Extra mammals possibly observed</b>				
Sand Cat	Chat des sables	Felis margarita	Something running away from our car seen on the first night during our first trip but we could not identify anything clearly	

I'm adding to this report a few pictures of some of the iconic species we observed during that trip or that were new to me.



African wild Cat



African golden Wolf



Desert Hedgehog



Maghreb Hares



Fennek



Rueppel's Fox



Desert Jerboa



Lesser mouse-tailed Bat



Lesser Egyptian Gerbil



Fat-tailed Gerbil

