

Observation of the Syrian Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis syriacus* Schreber, 1784) from Tabgha (Israel)

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Abstract: The author states the occurrence of the colony of the Syrian Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis syriacus* Schreber, 1784) around the Sea of Galilee at Tabgha (32°52' N, 35°32' E). The adult animals and their offspring were observed on March 14, 2011 on rocky debris. Totally there were 18 individuals recorded (6 adult and their offspring from which one cub was dead).

Key words: Syrian Rock Hyrax, *Procavia capensis syriacus*, Tabgha, Israel

Introduction

All hyrax species are small, woolly animals with no visible tail and blunt hoofed digits. They were widespread in the past and have had a greater distribution, at the present time they can be found only in Africa and the Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, north-east Africa, Senegal to Somalia to north Tanzania, south Malawi to south Angola, Namibia and south Africa, isolated mountains in Algeria and Libia) where there are more species and subspecies in three genera (e.g. WILSON, REEDER 1992, 2005; QUMSIYEH 1996; FERGUSON 2002; KINGDON 2007; AULAGNIER et al. 2009 etc.). The subspecies of the Syrian Rock Hyrax (*P. c. syriacus*) is known from Syria and Lebanon. FERGUSON (2002) states that in Israel it inhabits Mount Hermon up to 1 300 m a.s.l., the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee. Allopatric populations were observed on Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel. The Sinai subspecies occurs in the Negev Desert and may intergrade with the Syrian subspecies in the Judean Desert. Detailed overview of locality data on the occurrence of a species from the territory of Israel were summarized by QUMSIYEH

(1996). Author also noted an occurrence at Tabgha around the Sea of Galilee. Likewise, BLATCHFORD (2009) mentions the occurrence of species in surroundings of the Franciscan' Chapel of the Primacy of Peter' below the „Mount of the Beatitudes“ at Tabgha.

The aim of the present paper is mainly to supplement faunistic data from the monitored area and thus contribute to overall knowledge about the occurrence of the subspecies.

Material and Methods

On 8th-15th March, 2011 the author of the article attended the pilgrimage tour to the Holy Land Christian heritage. During our visit of Tabgha (8-15.03.2011), an area situated on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee (32°52' N, 35°32' E), the colony of the Syrian Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis syriacus*) was observed on rocky debris. Individuals were determined according to (QUMSIYEH 1996, FERGUSON 2002, KINGDON 2007, AULAGNIER et al. 2009).

Results and Discussion

Totally six adults and their offspring (12 individuals) were observed from which one cub was dead. Individuals were observed basking, while females fed their young. Although this colony of hyraxes is partially adapted to the immediate proximity of humans, individuals have been quite vigilant. This wariness may be caused due to the presence of suckling youngsters. It also meant that it was not possible to record the colony of individuals. Number of 18 individuals is therefore referred as the largest number recorded at any time. The total number could therefore be much greater and photo documentation captured only part of the population. This observation in a given habitat type was also consistent from species habitat demands put forward by several authors (QUMSIYEH 1996, FERGUSON 2002, KINGDON 2007 etc.). According to KINGDON (2007), rocks also created micro-climates that can be cooler, warmer, drier, moister, more shady, sunnier or less windy than the surroundings. Hyraxes can therefore counter-act climatic extremes to some extent by finding surfaces or crevices that suit to physiological needs at any particular time. Crevices also provide shelter from predators. Mentioned authors present, that the rock hyraxes are colonial with hierarchical social system. Breeding seasons are often very local and can differ from the top to the bottom of an escarpment. MENDELSSOHN (1965) estimated the mating season in

the Syrian Rock Hyrax to be August to September with young born in mid-March through early May. This fact confirms with the above-mentioned observation of a larger number of juveniles fed by females. Breeding season is also a critical stage of ontogenetic development, since there is increased pressure of predators as well as mortality of weaker youngster. Finding of dead juvenile, which died from unknown causes (parasitic or other disease or malnutrition caused by extrusion stronger subjects) confirms with this critical period for most young individuals. An individual observation is not a substitute for the ecological and biological research based on the usage of relevant methodologies. On the other hand, provide important information on the extension of a species in a given territory. Observations on different species of vertebrates (e.g. birds, mammals, amphibians or reptiles) recorded during the tourist excursions are not unusual (e.g. BLATCHFORD 2009 or various data in the internet), but lack of such observations is the absence of more detailed data.

The above observation of the individuals confirmed not only the historical occurrence of species in the study area, but also the present incidence as well.

Acknowledgments: *My gratitude* goes to my sister Julia Čanádyová MD. for help in the counting and documentation of individuals. I would like to thank to Dr. L. Kočíková for English revision.

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Received: 05.07.2011

Accepted: 04.01.2011