

Large Mammals in Israel

General Yoffe, head of the Israeli Nature Reserves Authority, has sent these comments on David Harrison's article on *The Large Mammals of Arabia*, in the September issue of *ORYX*, as it affects Israel.

Asiatic jackal *Canis aureus*: it is true that this jackal used to be very abundant in Israel some years ago but owing to a very extensive government poisoning operation three years ago, the jackal population was nearly exterminated. This was done mainly because of the danger of rabies. It was very 'successful' from the point of view of the department that did it, and only now, after three years, is there a very slight comeback of the jackals. It is amazing that in a country where once you could listen to an orchestra of howling, today you cannot hear even one.

Stone marten *Martes foina syriaca*: what Mr Harrison says is true, but they are completely protected in Israel and we hope will increase.

Ratel or honey badger *Mellivora capensis*: a few isolated occurrences have lately been reported of the honey badger. They are fully protected.

Common otter *Lutra lutra*: their numbers have increased lately round carp-rearing fish ponds in the sanctuary of the Lake Hula Nature Reserve.

Caracal lynx *Caracal caracal schmitzi*: quite a few are found in different parts of the country, such as south of the Dead Sea and on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and a few have been captured and kept in Professor's Mendelsohn's Zoo at the University of Tel Aviv.

Hyrax *Procavia capensis*: very abundant in Israel from the Lebanese and Syrian borders to the Red Sea at Eilat, mainly among the stones and cliffs of the hilly country, and they enjoy complete protection in Israel.

Nubian ibex *Capra ibex nubiana*: the population has increased in the last twenty years due to very strict and complete protection for this rare and beautiful animal. Our estimate of numbers is about 1500 to 1800.

Gazelles: their position in Israel has improved and numbers are growing steadily. We estimate the number of *Gazella gazella* to be about 4000 now, extending from our northern border to the Beersheva vicinity in the northern Negev. In the Negev itself we have about 1000 *G. dorcas* which are spread all over the Negev from south of Beersheva to Eilat. There is some reason to believe that in among them we have a small group of *G. g. arabica* and there will be an enquiry to verify this in the near future. Their numbers are around 50-100 according to a very rough estimate. All gazelles are completely protected and there is no legal hunting whatsoever. Poaching has been declining in the last few years.

Many changes have taken place in Israel during the last four years. The establishment of the Nature Reserves Authority as a government body, assisted by nature lovers, scientists and the Society for the Protection of Nature, has led to a very extensive education programme which in turn has resulted in the increase of wildlife in general, including mammals. But we suffer from inadvertent poisoning by the farmers and the government institutions who are supposedly protecting the crops and using too much poison.