

# Iran

## *Mammal Watching*

### **A Greentours Itinerary**

#### **Day 1**

##### **Arrive Tehran**

We'll depart European Airports in the early evening of Day 1.

#### **Days 2 - 4**

##### **Kavir National Park**

Our overnight flight to Tehran lands at around six so descending we'll see the magnificent dome of Demavand, the highest mountain in the old world west of the Himalaya, lit by the dawn sun. We'll take breakfast close to the airport and then head away from Tehran and into the central plateaux of Iran, a vast uninhabited region of deserts, dry rocky mountains and salt flats. Only two hours south of Tehran lies the Kavir National Park. The often surreal landscapes are stunningly beautiful. Distances become confusing - the air is so dry and clear that mountains fifty kilometres in the distance look like they are a mere five minute drive away.

This is one of two main areas in Iran where Asiatic Cheetahs still survive in the wild. Numbers are not high but the population is viable and has plenty of prey to sustain it so there is reason to believe that the population will start to rise again having hopefully bottomed out in recent years. Though there are few Cheetahs in a very large landscape it is the landscape (and the park rangers) that will help us to spot these wonderful cats. For the open countryside is broken by low hills that offer superb vantage points from which to spot them and the local rangers know which areas they prefer to frequent. Caracal are quite a common animal here and we've a decent chance of spotting one, especially on night excursions.

Desert Monitors, their fantastically cryptic markings making them difficult to spot, shuffle quietly under the shade of Saxaul bushes. Migrant birds are attracted to springs that line the hills and desert birds also come to drink - one can see Spotted Crakes alongside bright pink Trumpeter Finches, Pied and Eastern Pied Wheatears and abundant Desert Larks. The liquid purring calls of Black-bellied Sandgrouse fill the sweetly-scented early morning air accompanied by the mournful tones of Desert Wheatears. Cream-coloured Coursers display overhead and pretty Desert Finches will be building their nests in trees by our guesthouse.

#### **Days 5 & 6**

##### **Abbas Abad**

The sandy Artemisia steppes to the east of Abbas Abad are probably the easiest place in the central deserts of Iran to see the enigmatic Sand Cat. This little cat is tolerably common here and our local guide has found a good area for them. This

is also the other main location for Cheetah in Iran and we'll spend plenty of time concentrating on them too.

### **Days 7 - 9**

#### **Bahram Goor**

Bahram Goor has a phenomenal range of mammals. This is partly due to the area's isolated position and to its huge open untouched landscapes. High mountains rise out of the clear desert air all around us as we take in the serene beauty of Bahram Goor's vast salt flats and low rolling hills.

Near our guesthouse we can find the highly endangered and supremely fast Onager or Persian Wild Ass. These magnificent animals have a pale sandy coloured coat with a dark mane and tail. We'll seek out Goitred and Dorcas Gazelles as well as the local Alborz Red Sheep which is common here. Wolves are the main predators in Bahram Goor and though we'll find them difficult to see in the daytime we've a decent chance at night when we'll also see Rueppell's Fox, and hopefully the rare Blanford's Fox, a small fox with a face mask. This species has a restricted range and also an unusual habitat, it prefers open steep slopes dotted with rocks. Wild Cats are also found in the same habitats but it is in the open *Zygophyllum* and *Artemisia* dominated flats that we'll see the Caracal for here they are common. We should see them every night, and we'll hope to find one or two abroad in daylight too.

Striped Hyena's are found widely in Iran though in most areas are hardly common, but we've a good chance of seeing them here. The birdwatching is exceptional. There's a good chance of seeing Houbara Bustard and certainly Iran's most notable endemic, the beautiful Pleske's Ground Jay.

### **Days 10 – 13(am)**

#### **Zaryab Wildlife Refuge**

It may come as a surprise to learn that the Asiatic Black Bear is found in Iran. Even more so that we might see them! In the *Pistachia atlantica* forests of Zaryab Wildlife Refuge there is a good possibility to see these bears right at the western edge of their range. Zaryab is situated on the southern flanks of a high mountain range that rises out of the Iranian central deserts and due to its isolated location and position at the borders of several regions it has managed to reach the twenty-first century with a remarkable assemblage of large mammals still in place. We'll visit caves where the Bears shelter and we'll hope to see them on the surrounding slopes amid the open woodlands. Leopards are also found here in some numbers – Ibex, their main prey, are locally abundant in Zaryab. Here we've another chance of seeing both Wolf and Wild Cat.

## **Day 13 (pm) To Bandar Abbas and Departure**

We'll fly out of Bandar in the evening connecting with after midnight flights from Tehran that'll land in the morning of Day 14 in Europe.

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## **Persian Gulf Extension**

### **Day 14 Bandar Abbas and Hormoz Island**

We'll cruise across the blue waters of the Persian Gulf in a speed boat on the half-hour journey to the magical island of Hormoz - a real Sinbad-the-Sailor sort of place. Pods of Indo-Pacific Humpback (Plumbeous) Dolphins are a frequent sight. Behind the old red Portuguese fort is a contorted landscape of outrageously lurid rock formations. Pure white salt deposits burst from rocks of darkest crimson, glittering black mica sits cheek by jowl with saffron yellow or green layers - the effect is incredible under the dazzlingly blue sky. On the village's breakwaters we can sort through Lesser Crested and Swift Terns which obligingly sit side by side. Western Reef Herons hunt in the shallows over which Ospreys fish. As we follow the island's only road we'll see Desert and Eastern Pied Wheatears and look for migrants such as Radde's Accentor and Isabelline Shrike. Goitred Gazelle, surprisingly approachable here, watch us from rocky pinnacles or graze on sparse zizyphus bushes while overhead Brown-necked Ravens soar. Reptiles include Large-tailed Rock Agamas and Blanford's Semaphore Gecko.

### **Day 15 Hara National Park & Departure**

We'll take a boat trip into the wonderful Hara National Park where all manner of waterbirds are found from Great Stone Plovers to Crab Plovers. Loggerhead Turtles and even Black Finless Porpoises appear from time to time but it is another mammal, the endangered Dugong, that we're particularly looking for. Sea Snakes are also commonly observed.

We'll fly out of Bandar in the evening connecting with after midnight flights from Tehran that'll land in the morning of Day 16 in Europe.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at [enquiries@greentours.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@greentours.co.uk).

To Book a on this Holiday please fill in the booking form which you can download from [www.greentours.co.uk](http://www.greentours.co.uk) (also found in the Greentours brochure) and post/fax to Greentours, PO Box 148, Buxton SK17 1BE, UK. Tel/Fax +44 (0)1298 83563. After booking your place you'll receive a confirmation letter and a detailed information pack will be dispatched twelve weeks prior to departure. Mammal and bird checklists are available.