

Short Communication

A New Record of the Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* from Burqu Nature Reserve in the Eastern Desert, Jordan

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Abstract: The present note provides additional records for the Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* from Jordan, increasing its current known distribution range further to the north east.

The honey badger *Mellivora capensis* (Schreber 1776) is a widely distributed species ranging through the Savanna and steppe from Nepal, east India, and Turkmenistan westwards to Lebanon, and south of the Mediterranean to South Africa. It is the only species in the genus *Mellivora*, distributed in Africa, Southwest Asia, and the Indian peninsula (Do Linh San, *et al.*, 2016). The honey badger is a Least-Concern (LC) species according to the IUCN Red List and is known by its wide-range distribution and occurrence in a variety of habitats (Do Linh San, *et al.*, 2016). It is one the least studied mesocarnivores within its distribution range (Sharifi, *et al.*, 2020).

In Jordan, the species status is unknown, with no information available on the threats to its habitat and population. This species is recorded in Azraq, Al-Lujoon, near the southern part of the Jordan River, Jordan Valley and Mursa' (Eid, *et al.*, 2020). The honey badger is considered a very rare species and is expected to exist at a very low density in Jordan (Eid, *et al.*, 2020).

On the 2nd of July, 2022, a local guide in Burqu Nature Reserve in eastern Jordan managed to video film the honey badger northwest of the Burqu Dam. The honey badger was spotted running at 09:30 pm and was immediately filmed for approximately thirty seconds.

The exact coordination is N 32.669095, E 37.835977. Several photos were extracted from the video proving the presence of the honey badger in the area (Fig. 1).

This record expands the species' distribution range to the east. However, the scarcity in ecological data mainly on habitat selection due to the wide distribution range and the nature of the honey badger being a low-density population species (Begg, *et al.*, 2005) hinders the exact prediction of its distribution pattern in Jordan. Topography and land cover types were found to be positively correlated with the honey badger presence, while distance to road and villages were negatively correlated with the occurrence of the species (Gupta, *et al.*, 2012). Vegetation cover and productivity play an important role in the habitat selection of the honey badger (Kheswa, *et al.*, 2018). The preference of honey badgers for denser vegetation may be a predictor of resources availability (Pettorelli, *et al.*, 2011). In Burqu, the area is covered with scarce scrub vegetation, and there are few spots with Tamarisk trees surrounding artificial water ponds, which can serve as preferable habitats for the honey badger. On the other hand, the dense vegetation found in the Azraq wetland reserve can make a preferable habitat for the honey badger. Even though the wetland had several records of the Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*) [Hraishah: pers. Comm], the area around the wetland is populated and extended which posed challenges for the record of the honey badger in 1997 (Qatrameez and Nassar, 1997) resulting in a misidentification, especially that the record was based on foot print signs. In addition, no data are available in the reviewed literature on the existence of the honey badger and the



Figure 1. Photos of the honey badger extracted from the video showing the clear contrast between the white hair across the dorsal surface and the black hair across the ventral surface.

Eurasian badger in the same location, and the potential competition that may result.

In conclusion, it is recommended to equip this honey badger in Burqu with Satellite tracking to better understand the life-history traits of this species within the range of arid lands with scarce vegetation. Expanding research on other possible distribution ranges is also recommended. This record has proved the great usefulness of citizen science if supported with integrated management of protected areas for the benefit of local communities.

Acknowledgment

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