

Ecology and status of the Caracal, *Caracal caracal*, (Carnivora: Felidae), in the Abbasabad Naein Reserve, Iran

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Abstract. A Caracal survey was carried out between 2002 and 2006 in the Abbasabad Reserve, which covers more than 300,000 ha in eastern Esfahan province and which is one of the best habitats for this species in Iran. It was found to occur mainly in desert mountains and hilly terrain where rodents and hares are abundant. 80% of direct observations were made from solitary individuals and the remainder in groups of two. Although rodents, hares and ground birds form the main part of the Caracal diet in Abbasabad Reserve, it is also a serious threat to the small livestock belonging to local people. Sometimes the Caracal tries to catch wild ungulates.

Kurzfassung. Zwischen 2002 und 2005 wurde im Schutzgebiet von Abbasabad, das sich über mehr als 300,000 ha im östlichen Teil der Provinz Isfahan erstreckt, eine Erfassung des Karakals durchgeführt. Das Gebiet ist eines der besten für die Art im Iran. Die Art wurde hauptsächlich in Wüstenbergen und in hügeligem Gelände gefunden, wo Kleinnager und Hasen häufig sind. 80% der direkten Beobachtungen beziehen sich auf Einzeltiere, der Rest auf Gruppen von zwei. Obwohl Kleinsäuger, Hasen und Bodenvogelarten die Hauptrolle in der Nahrung des Karakals im Abbasabad-Schutzgebiet spielen, ist er doch auch eine ernstzunehmende Gefahr für kleine Haustiere der lokalen Bevölkerung. Manchmal versucht der Karakal, wilde Huftiere zu reißen.

Key words. Caracal, *Caracal caracal*, Abbasabad Reserve, Iran, ecology, diet.

Introduction

Despite its wide distribution throughout the eastern half of the country and its importance as a medium-sized, yet often the largest or top predator in many habitats or specific areas, little is known about various aspects of the ecology of the Caracal, *Caracal caracal* Schreber, 1776 in Iran. According to ETEMAD (1985), the Iranian Caracal is thought to belong to the subspecies *C. c. schmitzi* Matschie, 1812. The Abbasabad Reserve is considered to be one of the best habitats for this species in the country and it seems that this is the most abundant felid in the area (FARHADINIA et al. 2006). However, there is no basic information on the ecology of the Caracal resulting from Iranian researches inside the habitats of the species in Iran.

As part of a broader investigation on the felids of the Abbasabad Reserve, the present research is the first document on the Caracal from Iran and can be used as a baseline for further investigations, particularly inside the habitats around farmlands where Caracal depredations on small livestock animals is a problem.