

Status and activity patterns of the Caracal, *Caracal caracal* (Schreber, 1776), in Datça and Bozburun Peninsulas, Southwestern Turkey

(Mammalia: Felidae)

Yasin İlemin, Behzat Gürkan

Abstract. We were able to document the presence of the Caracal, *Caracal caracal* (Schreber, 1776), in southwestern Turkey in the course of a survey carried out in Datça and Bozburun Peninsulas between December 2007 and August 2008 with the help of camera traps. The Caracal was found to occur mainly (72% of the records) in pine woodlands with high habitat heterogeneity. 28% of the records are from maquis vegetation and this may be related to the high abundance of wild goats in this habitat, especially at the end of the winter season. However, no Caracal records were obtained from low scrub (phrygana) vegetation. Caracals were active during both day and night except for late morning and around midnight. Altogether, 13 medium-sized and large mammal species were detected during the camera trap survey.

Key words. Camera trap, Datça Peninsula, activity pattern, *Felis silvestris*, Middle East.

Introduction

The Caracal (*Caracal caracal* (Schreber, 1776)) is regarded as a species of Least Concern (IUCN 2010) on a global level. However, in Turkey it is very rare and only a few records are available (KUMERLOEVE 1986, KRYŠTUFEK & VOHRALÍK 2001, ÖZKURT et al. 2003, GIANNATOS et al. 2006). Studies on its conservation ecology are very limited (HEPCAN et al. 2008). The Caracal is an important large carnivore species in the Turkish Mediterranean, and large carnivores are sensitive indicators of ecosystem integrity since they survive only where lower trophic levels remain relatively undisturbed (GROS et al. 1996).

The Caracal was photographed by camera traps in Turkey for the first time in 2005 by GIANNATOS et al. (2006). That case showed the importance of camera trap surveys in projects that focus on wildlife ecology and conservation in Turkey. We present here the results of the first wide-ranging systematic survey focused on the activity patterns of the Caracal in the Datça-Bozburun Special Environmental Protection Area. This survey is also one of the first intensive studies conducted by using camera traps in Turkey.

The study area

The study was carried out in the Datça and Bozburun Peninsulas, located in south-western Turkey. The area has the status of a “special environmental protection area”, in terms of both archaeological and natural aspects (Fig. 2). Although tourism activities have increased in recent decades, especially in the south part of the Datça Peninsula, human activities have remained at a