

BOOK
OF THE MONTH

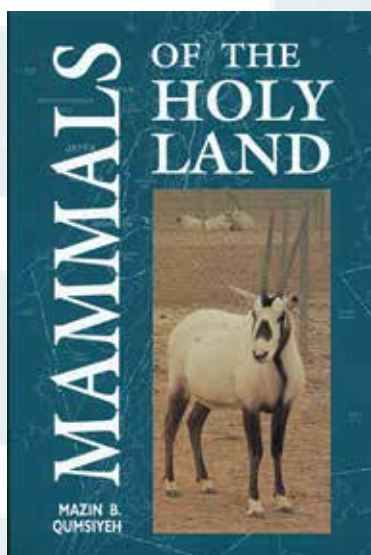
Mammals of the Holy Land

By Mazin B. Qumsiyeh

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389 pages, US\$ 35.00

Reviewed by Dr. Zuhair Amr



The eleven chapters of this book discuss various aspects of the mammalian fauna of Palestine and Jordan. An overview of the historical background of mammalian studies in the Holy Land presents details on expeditions and studies undertaken by European naturalists since the sixteenth century. Emphasis is placed on the work of the late Dr. Sana Attalah (Qumsiyeh's uncle) who during the 1960s was recognized as the first Palestinian mammalogist with specialized knowledge on Middle Eastern mammals.

Methods applied to mammalogical studies are presented and scientific

standards and methodologies are articulated, followed by a brief chapter on the mammalian evolution. An excursion into human history provides insight into the consequences that have resulted from various civilizations with waves of colonization and wars that have taken place in what is called the Holy Land, ending with an optimistic view and the hope for peace that will allow both humans and animals to thrive.

Detailed accounts on the geography, ecology, and zoogeography of Palestine show the importance of this small country as a meeting point for various

animal assemblages that exhibit an extraordinary biodiversity in the Middle East. Another chapter outlines the intense threats that affect the animals of Palestine and sheds light on the practices that have caused the decline or extinction of some species. Population growth and mass immigration, as well as destruction of habitats by Israeli settlements have accelerated the decline of some animal groups, such as bats.

The bulk of the book accounts for over 100 species of mammals, with taxonomic keys for the differentiated species. It provides details on the diagnostic features, local status, ecology, distribution, biology, genetics, and human interaction for each species, including images for most animals and skulls for some of them. Chapter 11 is by far the most interesting for laypersons, with an overview of

mammals that have been introduced to Palestine, including aurochs and water buffalo.

Mammals of the Holy Land remains one of best textbooks written on the mammals of the Holy Land and enjoys around 100 citations in the scientific literature. An updated edition is certainly due now in order to integrate recent findings and to avoid some shortcomings that require revisions regarding the mammalian fauna of this country.

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, a native of Beit Sahour, is a well-known mammalogist in zoological communities across the world, and particularly the Middle East and North Africa. Since the 1980s, his research on the mammals of the Middle East has contributed greatly to our present knowledge on the mammalian fauna of Palestine and Jordan.

