

First record of Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* from Fars province, Iran

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Abstract

On 4 February 2012, the carcass of an adult Honey Badger (Ratel) *Mellivora capensis* was found in the village of Sar Mashhad in the Dadin area, 120 km southwest of Shiraz city. The Honey Badger appeared to have been shot, presumably by local people. This is the first confirmed record of this carnivore in Fars province; there are only a few records available from anywhere in Iran in recent years. This record is located between two areas of known Honey Badger distribution in Iran, in the southwest and centre, suggesting that they may not, after all, be disjunct.

Keywords: beekeeping, distribution range, mountain woodlands, Ratel

اولین گزارش از رودک عسلخوار *Mellivora capensis* در استان فارس، ایران

چکیده

در 15 بهمن ماه 1390، لاشه یک عدد رودک عسلخوار بالغ در نزدیکی روستای سر مشهد از بخش دادین که در 120 کیلومتری جنوب غربی شیراز قرار دارد یافت شد. این گونه که احتمالاً توسط مردم محلی مورد هدف قرار گرفته بود، اولین گزارش مستند از این گوشتخوار کوچک جثه در استان فارس است، در حالی که در سال های اخیر گزارش های بسیار کمی از این گونه در ایران به دست آمده است. همچنین، این گزارش ما بین پراکندگی گذشته این گونه در جنوب غربی و مرکز ایران قرار دارد.

کلمات کلیدی: گستره پراکندگی، زنبورداری، درختزارهای کوهستانی

then eastwards to India and Nepal. But it is considered rare or to exist at low densities across most of its range (Vanderhaar & Hwang 2003, Begg *et al.* 2008).

Honey Badger has a disjunct recorded distribution in Iran (Karami *et al.* 2008). It is believed to be among the rarest mammals of the country and has been recorded only from Dez Wildlife Refuge and Ram Hormoz in Khuzestan province in the southwest; from Boroueyieh Wildlife Refuge in Yazd province and Khabr National Park in Kerman province in the central part of the country; and from near Gorgan and along the Atrak river in Golestan province in the northeast (Fig. 1; Lay 1967, Harrington & Dareshuri 1976, Etemad 1985, Ziaie 2008). Lay (1967) cited another report by Cheesman (1920) from Bak-sai on the Iran–Iraq frontier in Lorestan province and that is widely reported as in Iran, but it is in fact in Iraq.

Honey Badgers in Iran are thought to belong to *M. c. indica* and *M. c. wilsoni* in the northeast and southwest, respectively (Etemad 1985). A new subspecies, *M. c. buechneri* was named from Turkministan (Baryshnikov 2000) and presumably oc-

Honey Badger (Ratel) *Mellivora capensis* has an extensive range in most of sub-Saharan Africa and through the Middle East as far north as Turkmenistan and southwest Kazakhstan,

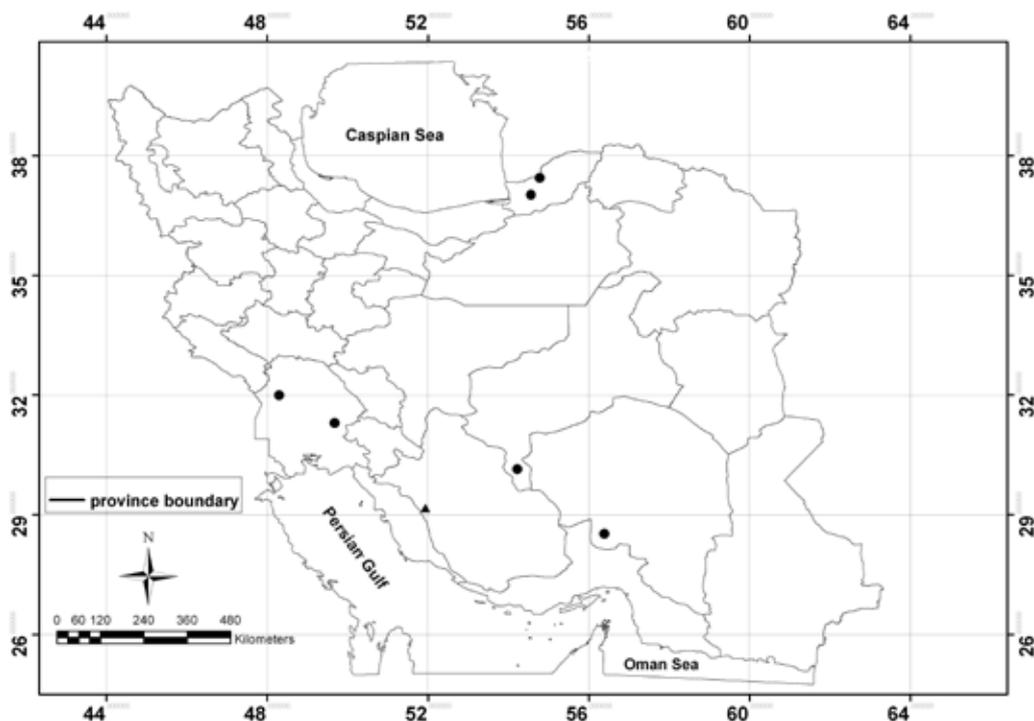


Fig. 1. Confirmed records of Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* in Iran (circles) taken from Etemad (1985) and Ziaie (2008), and the new locality in Fars province (triangle).

curs in northern Iran (Karami *et al.* 2008). In Iran, this species inhabits a wide variety of habitats such as woodlands, shrub lands around rivers, and also arid and semi arid areas (Ziaie 2008).

On 4 February 2012, a dead Honey Badger was found beside a rural road crossing farmland near the village of Sar Mashhad in the Dadin area (Fig. 2). It seemed to have been killed by gun shot, presumably by local people. The area is located in the west of Fars province, at 29°17'N, 51°44'E and an elevation of 800 m a.s.l., near the border of Bushehr province (Fig. 1).

Dadin is a mountainous area covered with sparse woodland. The main river of this area is the Dadin. *Ziziphus lotus* and *Z. nummularia* are the dominant plant species of Dadin. These plants are important for producing honey, so there are many local people's beehives around this area. All are on the ground, and thus accessible to Honey Badgers. This overlap with Honey Badger range probably leads to some conflict between bee-farmers and this species, as occurs elsewhere in its range (see Begg & Begg 2002), but so far we have no direct information from this area.

Fars province was a gap in the known distribution range of Ratel in Iran, between the southwest and centre. This report suggests that potentially suitable habitats between these two areas should be investigated. Honey Badger status in Fars province could be clarified by more field studies, such as interview with local people and camera-trapping, and also the investigation of possible conflicts with local communities and other threats to the species.



Fig. 2. Dead Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* in the Dadin area, Iran, 4 February 2012 (photograph: Zolfaghar Salimi).

As the next step, it is important to identify the range and potential dispersal corridors of this species in southwestern Fars province, to assist its conservation. Ratel is a protected species by the Iranian Department of Environment laws, but its effective conservation will require education of local people, and perhaps a monitoring and management plan. If there is significant human–Ratel conflict over raiding of bee-hives, this can often be resolved through hive protection (C. Begg *in litt.* 2012).

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