

## Recent records of the Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* (Schreber, 1776) in Algeria

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**Abstract**

The Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* is rare in Algeria. Its presence was last detected in 1980 in the southern part of the country, near the Moroccan border. In 2018 a live Honey Badger was filmed in Hammada Tanfouchai, near Tindouf, south-west Algeria, and followed by car during a naturalist expedition. A dead individual was found south-east of Tindouf by forest rangers. We also received information about a Honey Badger found dead in a road in 2019. These new data confirm that this mustelid is still present in Algeria and that follow-up work should be undertaken to better devise protection measures

**Keywords:** Viverridae, Mustelidae, Herpestidae, Prionodontidae, tropical lowland forest, wildlife conservation, camera-trapping

**Récente observation du Ratel *Mellivora capensis* (Schreiber, 1776) en Algérie**

Le Ratel *Mellivora capensis* est un carnivore rare en Algérie. Sa présence a été signalée pour la dernière fois en 1980 dans le sud du pays, près de la frontière marocaine. En 2018, un individu vivant a été filmé poursuivi par une voiture lors d'une expédition naturaliste à Hammada Tanfouchai près de Tindouf (sud-ouest de l'Algérie). Un autre individu mort a été retrouvé dans le sud-est de Tindouf par des gardes forestiers. Nous avons également reçu des informations sur un autre spécimen tué sur la route près de Tinzaouatine en 2019. Ces nouvelles données confirment que ce Mustelidae est toujours présent sur le territoire algérien et qu'un travail de suivi devrait être entrepris pour mieux concevoir des mesures de protection.

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### Introduction

The Honey Badger has an extensive range, which extends through most of sub-Saharan Africa from the Western Cape, South Africa, to southern Morocco and south-western Algeria, and outside Africa through Arabia, Iran and western Asia to Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and the Indian subcontinent (Do Linh San *et al.* 2016). It is considered rare or to exist at low densities across most of its range (Begg *et al.* 2013).

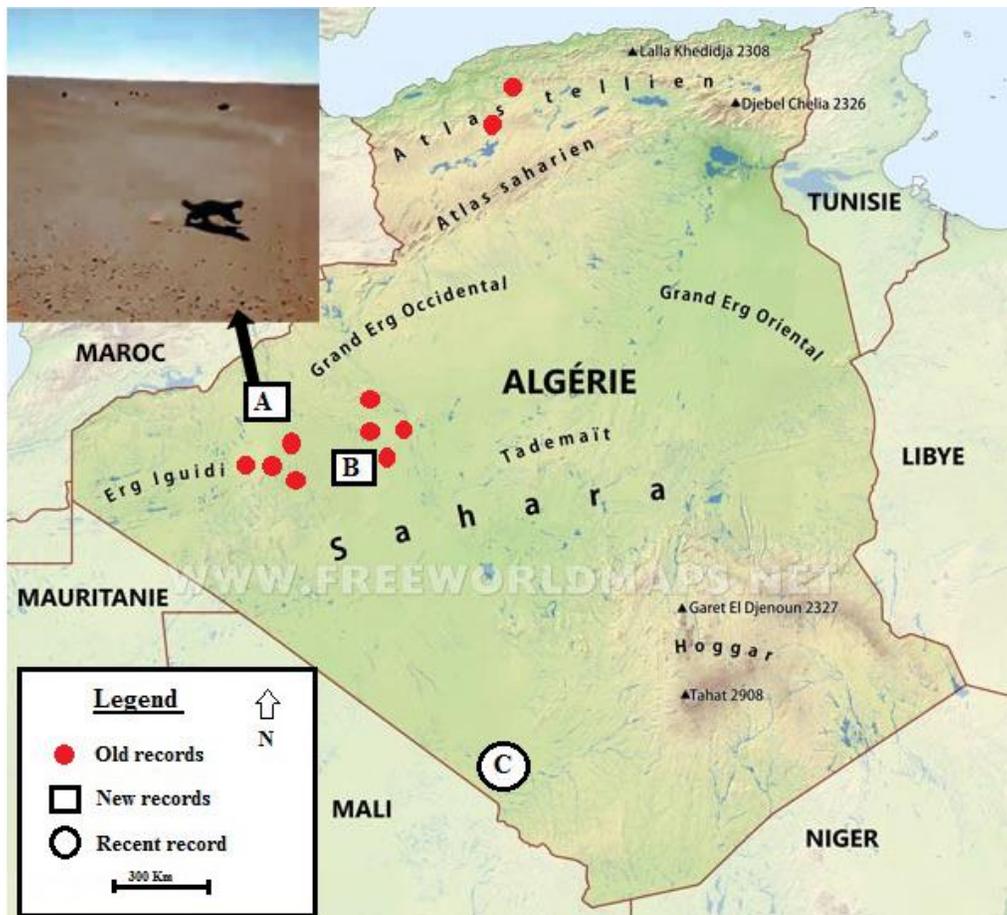
Older mentions of this species in Algeria were reported by Joleaud (1922), who wrote that M. Augieras recorded its presence near the pools of water between Tabalbalba (29°24'22"N–3°15'33"W), Igli (30°27'11.5"N–2°17'29.1"W) and Adrar (27°52'00"N–0°17'00"W) in south-west Algeria, and in Taoudenni (22°40'28"N–3°58'43"W) in Mali. In 1948, Panouse observed a Honey Badger in Hammada Draa, a few kilometres from Merkala (Panouse 1954). C. Petter, cited by Dupuy (1966), noted its presence at Zeghamra (29°59'N–02°29'W), near Beni Abbès. In 1980, Comminardi & Kowalski collected a skeleton and a

skin between El-Kebch and Djorf El-Aydada, near Oued Sougueur, south of Labiod Sidi-Cheikh. In 1986, K. De Smet (pers. comm.) noticed a stuffed individual exhibited at the headquarters of the Algerian Federation of Hunting Weapons, in Algiers.

### Recent observations and reports in Algeria

On 25 January 2018, amateur naturalists N.H. and F.S. carried out an excursion in the region of Tindouf ( $27^{\circ}40'00''\text{N}-8^{\circ}09'00''\text{W}$ ), south-west of Algeria, to observe wild fauna.

During the day, N.H. and F.S. observed a Honey Badger, which was on the move. Following in their all-terrain vehicle, they filmed the Honey Badger (Fig. 1). The observation took place in Hammada Tanfouchai, near Tabalbala ( $29^{\circ}24'22''\text{N}-3^{\circ}15'33''\text{W}$ ), in the Tindouf region.



**Fig. 1.** The distribution of old, recent and new records of the Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* in Algeria.  
 A: Hammada Tanfouchai, near Tabalbala, near Tindouf, where a Honey Badger was videoed in 2018 (photo: Nadjem Haissoun and Fayca Seddiki); B: Touiref Bouam, south-east of Tindouf;  
 C: Tinzaouatine road to Bordj Badji Mokhtar.

Local residents who were shown the video reported that a dead specimen had been recently found by foresters in Touiref Bouam, 60 km from the Moroccan border.

Ahmim (2019) received information about an individual found dead in 2019 on the road from Tin Zaouatine to Bordj Badji Mokhtar.

## Discussion

Although considered of Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, the Honey Badger's global population is in decline (Do Linh San *et al.* 2016). In Algeria, its presence has not been reported since 1980, until the reports mentioned above. In Morocco, the species is considered a rare and threatened mammal (Cuzin 2003) that exists mainly in the Central and Eastern High Atlas, along the Dra'a river and in Tafilat, as well as in the Moroccan Atlantic Sahara (Aulagnier & Thévenot 1986, Cuzin 2003).

In 2015, Cherkaoui & Bouajaja (2017) carried out a seasonal survey that included 10 transects with a total length of 122 km and interviews with local residents in the region of Aferkat, in Guelmim Province, Morocco. These authors mentioned that according to eight interviewed beekeepers, Honey Badger is a fairly common animal in Aferkat. Indeed, two to five attacks per year were reported during the preceding decade and five individuals were killed. In October 2015, a male adult Honey Badger was trapped and killed by local beekeepers. There are therefore indications that the Honey Badger is more common in Morocco than has been heretofore known, suggesting that the species may also be more common in Algeria – vast areas of which are only very thinly populated with potential human observers – than has been believed.

Honey Badgers, which consume honey and prey on some domestic animals, are said to be regularly persecuted by beekeepers and farmers throughout their distribution range (Do Linh San *et al.* 2016). They are also hunted for bushmeat in some sub-Saharan African countries (Do Linh San *et al.* 2016).

Although protected by Algerian law, the rare Honey Badger requires more attention, including studies of its behaviour and ecology, especially its trophic niche, since it raids beehives and inconveniences beekeepers. Because it may come into conflict with humans, raising awareness about the Honey Badger's key role in ecosystems appears to be essential to ensuring the effective protection of this species.

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