

Fauna Palaestina: MAMMALIA of ISRAEL



The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities publishes two monumental series aimed at compiling information on all the species of plant and animal life in the region and making it available to scholars internationally, in richly illustrated detail. *Flora Palaestina* and *Fauna Palaestina*, taking their Latin titles from the geographical region roughly defined by the former Roman colony, stand alongside similar series created for other regions the world over. They are used widely by botanists and zoologists in Israel and abroad and are among the most sought after products of the Academy's Publications Department.

Up to now, the *Fauna Palaestina* series has concentrated on Israel's small creatures, with six volumes of *Insecta*, three volumes of *Arachnida* (spiders and scorpions) and one of *Mollusca*. By contrast, all of Israel's 92 species of terrestrial mammals (including bats) fit into a single 440-page volume. The number, based on up-to-date observation, is unstable. One species, the coypu, was introduced to the region to be bred for its fur - which, however, proved worthless. The animals were released into the wild, where they flourish near Israel's small bodies of water. Another, the wild ass, was reintroduced by Israel's nature authorities as part of an ongoing effort to recover species once native to the region. On the other hand, several extinct species, like the roe and the Mediterranean fallow deer, could no longer be included in this description of fauna known to exist today in the region.

The volume makes available in English a vast body of information on Israel's terrestrial mammals that has previously been at the disposal of readers of Hebrew. The body of the text is devoted to Israel's 6 species of insectivores, 32 species of bats, 30 species of rodents, 18 species of carnivores, four species of cloven-hoofed mammals (a group that brings together the wild boar and the antelope), and just one species each of hare and wild ass. All these species are described in fascinating detail, with information on their distribution, fossil records (when available), karyotype, ecology, diet, behavior, reproduction, parasites and relations with humans. Skull photos and tables of body and skull characteristics give biologists an "inside view" of the species under discussion.

Both authors, Professor Emeritus Heinrich Mendelssohn, winner of the Bialik, Weizmann and Israel prizes, and Professor Yoram Yom-Tov, Mendelssohn's colleague at Tel Aviv University, are deeply involved in efforts to conserve Israel's natural heritage. The 37 pages of beautiful color photos that conclude this volume poignantly demonstrate the value of what we have to conserve.

This latest addition (1999) and prior volumes in the *Flora Palaestina* and *Fauna Palaestina* series are available directly from the Publications Department of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Fax: 972-2-567-6059; Email: tami@academy.ac.il).



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The Foundation can be reached at:
The American Foundation for Basic Research in Israel (AFBRI)
c/o PDA,
25 W. 45th St.,
New York,
NY 10136
Phone:
(212) 840-1166
Fax:
(212) 840-1514

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