

Striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*) trapped in Hatay, Turkey.

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On Friday, 9 January, a striped hyena was trapped by a leg hold trap in Altınözü, Hatay by Mustafa Seçer who is a local hunter. The animal was slightly injured from his leg. Shortly after this, he was noticed by the local gendarme. The animal was brought to the local veterinary school to treat its wound. Soon after, the striped hyena in a cage, the local trapper and the local authorities appeared on television channels and press. It is expected that a fine of 150 million to 10 billion Turkish lira (about 100 US\$ to 6500 US\$ according to current rate) will be given to the hunter. The news got a good media coverage. One of the major newspapers announced the news as "Hyena from Africa was trapped" (The picture of the animal was not included in this text in respect to the copyrights. Please contact us if you would like to receive the relevant news and the photograph) According to the newspapers and television channels, there had been no hyena sightings for the last 40 years. They also did not know if there were hyenas in Turkey even before! Although some of the media presented the news as if an alien from outer space was found, the good side of the story was, the majority of the general public, if not all, was informed about the presence of hyena in Turkey for the first time. The authorities announced that they will release the animal back to wild rather than sending it to a zoo. After a short investigation by the gendarme, it was understood that there were two other hyenas trapped by the same local and they were sold to a local zoo in the region. Now, WWF Turkey and local authorities are planning to fit radio-collars on the animals and to track the animals after the release however due to the high cost of the radio-collars and the very short time available to purchase the radio collars, there is an urgent need for a sponsor or a person that cover the relevant costs. The species is in the Lower Risk category according to IUCN Global Red List (version 2.3 1994). However, we consider the species as Critically Endangered in Turkey.

In Turkey, striped hyena was considered to be extinct by most of the authorities until 2002 when WWF Turkey announced the first results of Southeastern Anatolia Biodiversity Research Project and Amanos Mountains Gift to the Earth Project. The surveys conducted within the framework of the projects revealed the current presence and distribution of hyena in Turkey. It was also interesting for us to note that some local communities used hyena as a supplement to their diet. Early findings of the survey were published in July-December issue of the World Conservation Union Species Survival Commission Newsletter Species in 2002 and then presented at the 4th. European Congress of Mammalogy in Brno, Czech Republic in 2003. Our results suggest that the hyena is found as small isolated populations in several locations in Western and Mediterranean part of Turkey. But the main population is found in Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Adıyaman, Mardin, Şırnak and Siirt in Southeast Turkey.



The striped hyena habitat (on the left) and the animal that was killed in 2001 in Southeast Turkey. (Photos: Ö. E. Can)

The large carnivores of Turkey are: Wolf (*Canis lupus*), striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Anatolian leopard (*Panthera pardus tulliana*) and North Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*). There had been very little attempts by Turkish biologists to study large mammals of Turkey. Until the 1990s, the only attempts to understand the countrywide distribution of large mammals were made by Hans Kumerloeve who published an article and presented his data on the distribution of all large mammals in Turkey in 1966 and later by Nihat Turan who presented draft distribution maps for most of the large mammals in Turkey in 1984. Later, we have collected countrywide data to reveal the status of large mammal populations in Turkey since mid 1990s. In cooperation with national authorities, within the framework of several projects some of which are specific to wolf, brown bear, Anatolian leopard and striped hyena, we have collected data on the distribution of those species, human-carnivore conflict and human-wildlife interaction by working in the field with local communities since 1998. Our current efforts (together with Dr. Tony-Mitchell Jones from British Nature and European Mammal Society) are concentrated on Large Mammal Database and Atlas for Turkey and on the National Action Plans for wolf, brown bear and hyena in Turkey (together with Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe and relevant IUCN Specialist Groups). For an update about this recent hyena story and to learn how you can contribute to our efforts for large carnivore research and conservation in Turkey, you may contact us.

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