

Why the hyrax (*Procavia capensis*) cannot be the Biblical *shafan*?

#758



3 hyrax pictures (short-eared, short-legged with only 2 upper-front-teeth)

Regrettably in many books,¹ *chumashim* and *gemarot* (*Chulin 59a*), it is written and/or illustrated with pictures, that the Biblical "*shafan*" mentioned in *Parashot Shemini* and *Ree* is the hyrax (daman or rock badger). In my humble opinion (endorsed by many Gedole Yisrael), this identification is not possible because of the following **8 reasons**:

1. The Torah in Leviticus 11:5 described the *shafan* as "*maaleh gerah*", but we have not found any evidence that the hyrax practices rumination (as the cow), cecotrophy (as the rabbit), nor even merycism (as the kangaroo), so the **hyrax is not "*maaleh gerah*"**.

But anyway, merycism is not equivalent to "*maaleh gerah*", because it is not nutritionally imperative and it does not resemble rumination or cecotrophy.²

2. The hyrax has **short legs**³ so it is a *sheretz* (short-legged creature) and not a *chaya* (the *shafan* is a *chaya*⁴ and every *sheretz* is already forbidden to be eaten as it is clearly stated in Leviticus 11:41. For the definition of *sheretz* see Rashi *ad loc.*, Rashi on Genesis 1:24, Baba Kama 80a, Rashi, Tosfot *ad loc.*, etc.

3. The hyrax has **hoof-like claws**⁶ and is **plantigrade**⁷, see *Pesikta Zutrata* on *Shemini* 29b where the *shafan*'s distal part of the foot is described as similar to a cat's foot. A cat's foot is not hoof-like, nor plantigrade, but digitigrade.⁸

4. The Rashbatz⁹ (*Yabin Shemua*, page 11) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has **long ears**; however the hyrax has short ones.¹⁰

5. The Rashbatz (*Yabin Shemua*, page 11) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has a **thin skin**; in contrast, the hyrax has a thick one.¹¹

¹ Some of them already have been modified in subsequent editions or at least meanwhile the authors have changed their conclusions.

² Smith Joseph A. "Macropod Nutrition". *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Exotic Animal Practice*. May 2009;12(2):197-208.

³ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 94

⁴ *Pesikta Zutrata* on *Shemini* 29b

⁵ Because in *Perashat Shemini* the *shafan* appears in the section of the *chayot* and not in the section of the *sheratzim*.

⁶ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 94

⁷ <http://wfscnet.tamu.edu/twc/WFSC401/Lab%203-Mammalian%20Orders.ppt> accessed 16/jul/06

⁸ http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/topics/mammal_anatomy/running_fast.html accessed 16/jul/06

⁹ ר' שמעון דוראן, בעל התשב"ץ, 1361-1444

¹⁰ "Hyrax," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994

¹¹ www.shamir.org.il/info/golshim/micha_kagan/shafan.doc accessed 13/mar/11

6. The Rashba (*Chulin* 59a) wrote explicitly that the *shafan* has **many** superior (upper) front-teeth. In contrast, the hyrax has only two.¹²

7. The hyrax' **geographic distribution** is not¹³ the one stated as the *shafan*'s by Rav Jonah Ibn Janach.¹⁴ Rav Ibn Janach ז"ל lived (990 – 1055) in Cordoba and Saragossa, Spain.¹⁵ He wrote in his *Sefer HaShorashim*:

“And the *shafan*”. It is the “*wabr*”, an animal the size of a cat, which is **found [only] a little in the East, but is abundant among us** [in Spain]. Nevertheless the masses do not know it by that name, but by the name “*conilio*”, a Spanish name [for rabbit].¹⁶

As can be seen illustrated in the following map, the hyrax indeed *is* widely found in the [Middle] East and is *not* found in Spain.



الشين والغاء والنون وאת השפן זה הוור והו
 דובי על قدر הסטור והי פי המشرق قليلة واما عندنا
 فكثيرة معروفة الا انها لا تعرفها عامتنا بهذا الاسم
 بل بالقنليه وهو اسم اعجمي:

8. The hyrax does not match with **explicit translations** stated by the *Rishonim* as the *shafan*'s identity. The *shafan* is translated as “*conilio*” (i.e. rabbit in a foreign language^{17 18}) by Rav Jonah Ibn Janach, *Rambam Perush Hamishnayot* on *Ukatzin* 3:3 (on their original Arabic texts) and Rav Yosef Ben Nachmias on *Proverbs* 30:26.

Following is the scanned page of the *Rambam* published by N. Dirinburg, Berlin 1887:



Common rabbit

הוא אלמק. ורי שמעון יקול אן לחוס שיחבאר בסוף זה הפרק. ורי שמעון אומר
 אלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל
 לא תחמא מחשבה פי אלמקאל אלמקאל צריך מחשבה בשווקי העיר לסי שידוע
 לאן מעלומה פי אלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל ואלמקאל
 הלכה כרי שמעון. (ב) בערבי אלמקאל ונראה שציל אלמקאל.

Conclusion:

For the eight reasons listed above, we consider *B"H* that the hyrax cannot be the Biblical *shafan*.

This information is analyzed in detail in the 2nd edition (2023) of the book “The Enigma of the Biblical *Shafan*” (with many important approbation letters, available on request) which includes Torah and scientific research suggesting (based on 16 evidences) that **the common long-eared rabbit is the *shafan*.**

P.S. According to my humble opinion, **very fundamental ramifications** can be the result of this issue.

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T.O.V.

A Hebrew version of this document is available on request.

¹² <http://www.skullsite.co.uk/Hyrax/hyrax.htm> accessed 26/feb/11

¹³ <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/41766/0> accessed on 22/dec/11

¹⁴ *The Book of Hebrew Roots* by Abu'l Walid Marwan Ibn Janah. Oxford, 1875 by Ad. Neubauer. Root שפן.

¹⁵ <http://www.torahproductions.com/commentators/164.html> accessed 31/jul/11

¹⁶ Ibn Janah, *op. cit.* (Translation from the original in Arabic).

¹⁷ פירוש רבי יוסף בן נחמיה על משלי, ביאור מלות לע"ז מהמו"ל ר' משה אריה באמבערגער (דף XX).

¹⁸ <http://open-dictionary.com/Rabbit> accessed 13/jul/06