

The influence of oil spills in 'Avrona nature reserve on the distribution and behavior of reptiles and insects

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Oil spills may cause damage to species and ecosystems. In contrast to our extensive knowledge of marine oil pollutions, not much is known about the effects of oil spills on terrestrial desert ecosystems. My Ph.D. goal was to determine the long and short-term effects of oil spills on the distribution and behavior of desert fauna, using the 'Avrona nature reserve, which was polluted by oil twice in that past decades, as a model system. I conducted a series of field surveys and lab experiments in which I examined reptiles and ground-dwelling insects exposed to two types of contaminated soil – one that was polluted in 2014, and another that was polluted in 1975. My results highlight two important principles: that the distribution of animals in the field does not necessarily reflects their preferences, and that different species react differently to habitat disturbances (even those that in human eyes are uninhabitable) according to their life history and ecological needs.



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