

Report on the illegal trade in wildlife in the North of Morocco



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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 90's the trade in the now endangered Barbary macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*) has become apparent. Zoos and sanctuaries in Europe were overwhelmed with requests for shelter and facilities filled up rapidly with the species, mainly infants and juveniles coming from the illegal trade directly from Morocco. It was estimated at the time (2003/ 2004) that hundreds of macaques were illegally passing the border into Europe every year, and today the illegal trade has become one of the most important reasons for rapid decline of mainly the Middle Atlas region, where the last large global population still survives (no more than 4000 -500 individuals (van Lavieren & Wich, 2009). The Moroccan Primate Conservation foundation (MPC) has actively been working on the conservation of the endangered Barbary macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*) since 2004. One of the important activities of MPC is the monitoring of the trends in the illegal trade and the numbers of wild populations, to measure the effects of the conservation actions that have been conducted by both MPC and national/ international NGOs and the European and Moroccan governments that are directly involved in Barbary macaque conservation.

2 METHODS

In September 2011 MPC conducted a 10 day survey in the north of Morocco visiting the souks and other places of interest where possible trade in wild animals could occur. MPC chose to not only focus on the illegal trade in the Barbary macaques but also to survey for trade in any other wildlife. Els van Lavieren (EvL), together with a Moroccan research assistant (Monir Haissour) and a photographer (Ronald Troostwijk) visited/ surveyed the following locations:

Tangier, Tetouan, Chefchoauen, Al Hoceima, Nador, Gourougou Natural Reserve, Saidia, Oujda, Tazzeka National Park and Fes. The survey method was based on the methods used by van Lavieren in 2005, during a survey on the illegal trade in the Barbary macaque in central and southern Morocco (van Lavieren, 2008). After a walk through the survey location where most wild animals were immediately spotted, we talked to animal vendors in the markets to gain more details about the trade in a specific species, stating that we were students conducting research on the pet trade in Morocco. We also visited natural areas of interest, where we talked to local people to gather more information. We also talked to the local authorities (Eaux et Forêts) in Nador and to people working for environmental NGO's in the north of Morocco.

3 RESULTS

3.1 TANGIER – PLACE DE FES / ASILAH

Place de Fes in Tangier is a location where since 2004, MPC has always seen a young macaque for sale. This location can be compared to Marrakech, where also permanently young macaques are for sale. As Tangier is close to the ferry ports to Spain, it is an ideal location to buy macaques before travelling to Europe. We found 1 Barbary macaque like usual (Picture 1).

The vendor claims that they keep this macaque to attract tourists, but it is also always for sale and as soon as the young macaque is sold, a new macaque is captured to be kept on the market. It is also possible to order a macaque on this location – the vendors will contact the poachers in the region of Azrou and arrange that the macaque(s) are transported to Tangier to be sold 1 or 2 days later. Sometimes however, according to the vendor, they catch the monkeys from Talassemrane.

Picture 1: A young macaque for sale in Tangier



A macaque costs around 120 Euro. The Barbary macaques are all sold for the pet trade and there is no preference to the sex of the macaques that are sold. The vendor claims that most macaques are sold to be pets for the children in the family.

During the educational project in the port of Algeciras in 2011, where tourists on their way to Morocco received information to not buy wildlife and specifically Barbary macaques during their stay, Spanish truckers commented that in Malabata, near Tangier, on the crossroad to Marina D'Or there usually is a man with an empty cage that sells young Barbary macaque for about 1000 Dirham (+/- 100 Euros). He sedates the animals so that they can be smuggled across the border. Others commented that in the market of Asilah it is easy buy macaques too.

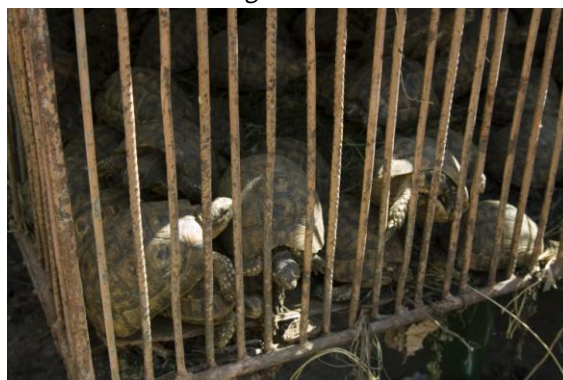
Apart from Barbary macaques, there are also many reptiles (*Chameleo sp*), bird species and Barbary ground squirrels (*Atlantoxerus getulus*) for sale on Place de Fes in Tangier. The reptiles are mainly all sold in the summer, when the Moroccans living in Europe come to Morocco.

For all the wildlife sold on the market in Fes, the Moroccans living in Europe are the main buyers of exotic pets. They also buy exotic pets to give as a gift/ souvenir to their family in Europe. The vendors claim that most of their wildlife is bought in the IKria market in Casablanca.

3.2 CHEFCHAOUEN & TALESEMANTANE NATIONAL PARK

In Chefchaouen the wildlife vendors claim that no macaques are for sale on this location. They said that the authorities in Chefchaouen would not accept the sale of Barbary macaques. The most common species that is sold in Chefchaouen is the tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) that is mainly bought because they are believed to cure asthma or relieve symptoms of asthma. The main group of buyers is Moroccan people, and they cost around 10 DH each. All these tortoises are wild-caught (Picture 2). In Talemantane, people do occasionally come to ask about buying macaques, but poaching seldom takes place in this national park.

Picture 2: *Testudo graeca* for sale on markets



3.3 AL HOCEIMA & KETAMA

When we asked the vendors in Al Hoceima about buying Barbary macaques, some people reacted in disbelief. The people on this market claimed to have never heard of the trade in Barbary macaques in this region before. Ketama is known for its trade in hash and thus the need for other kinds of income is not so high. The vendors do mention “Ain Aicha” (near Fez) as a place where monkeys are captured.

We found mainly pigeons, rabbits, canary birds and tortoises on the markets. We asked about chameleons but they claim that these are not sold in this region because the chameleons are used by women against their husband (superstition).

One person we spoke to claims that he only buys macaques if there is a demand, and then he asks 50% advance so most people find different locations to buy a macaque. Here the biggest demand comes from tourists and not the Moroccan people living in Europe. This person claimed that he sold 2 macaques in the last 2 years. They captured the macaque in Beni Bonsar near Ketama with tranquilizers. The vendor mentioned that he preferred to retrieve the macaques from Fez because the poachers there are more experienced.

We also spoke to Prof. Hakim who is connected to the Al Hoceima National Park. He told us that in the summer many macaques and other wildlife are offered for sale along the road between Tangier Med port and Ceuta. EvL has seen this and has received many reports on this from visitors to Morocco.

3.4 GOUROUGOU NATURAL RESERVE

Gourougou Natural Reserve is a forested area near Melilla and Nador. As Melilla is a Spanish enclave, the region is popular with Sub Saharians who try to find an illegal passage to Europe. In the past, a Barbary macaque population was reintroduced in this region. There have been many claims that Sub Saharians who try to find their way to Melilla hide in this region in the forests and sometimes catch macaques to eat them. Also once in a while they catch a goat or cattle. This was confirmed by 3 local people from different sources.

There is a man who feeds the macaques in the forest to attract tourists who can buy peanuts or other food to give to the macaques. Local people confirm that this person is also involved in the capture and selling of macaques. The local Eaux et Forêts claim that this person is an unofficial E&F volunteer but they did not seem aware of the involvement in the poaching and trade.

3.5 NADOR (SOUK AFADOR)

In the souk Afador in Nador we found quite a few common buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) for sale (picture 3). The vendors claim that in 2009 and 2010 they sold 4 Barbary macaques that were all smuggled to Europe by tourists. The vendors confirmed that the macaques are captured in Gourougou Natural Reserve from the man who lives in proximity to the macaques. They also added that the macaques in Gourougou NR are more difficult to poach than in the Azrou region.

We also found tortoises (*Testudo graeca*) on this market and they are again sold to people with asthma and to tourists who smuggle them to Europe.

Picture 3: Common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)



3.6 MELILLA BORDER

We visited the Melilla customs on the Spanish side and asked them for information about the illegal trade in wildlife. They said that they have hardly ever confiscated a macaque on this border (it is too risky to cross 2 borders and to take the ferry with illegal macaques) but they did however say that they regularly find tortoises and birds that are being smuggled across the border.

3.7 SAIDIA

This tourist town is only popular in the summer between June and August. We saw no wild animals in the little souk but if a person would ask for a macaque it could be arranged easily according to the vendors. In Saidia many tortoises are sold to tourists every year and smuggled across the border to Europe. According to Najib Bachiri of the Association Homme et Environnement, they reintroduced many tortoises in the region of Saidia that were confiscated in Spain a few years ago that originally came from Morocco. In the summer there is also entertainment with the macaques, like on the Jma Fnaa square in Marrakech. Mr. Bachiri however does not believe that these people have a permit for this and that they are doing it illegally.

3.8 BERKANE – NAJIB BACHIRI OF THE ASSOCIATION *HOMME ET ENVIRONNEMENT*

In Berkane we found 4 Barbary macaques kept in a cage in an open air restaurant (picture 4). The owner claims that they received these macaques from Eaux et Forêts.

Picture 4: Barbary macaques kept in a restaurant in Berkane



Mr. Bachiri told us about his experience with wildlife trade in this region. He said that in Tangier, Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants sell tortoises and other wildlife on the menu, all wild caught. He said that chameleons are not sold much in this region because of superstition, and that for this reason the chameleon population in the region is not too much influenced by the trade in wildlife.

Species that are heavily poached in the region however are falcons (*Falco sp.*) and the European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*). Falcon nests are poached and the young falcons are sold to mainly people from the Middle East. According to Mr. Bachiri, this is illegal and the fine for poaching or selling falcons is around 1000 Euro. They are also threatened by chemical products and pesticides that are used on crops.

The European Goldfinch (Chardonneret in French) are also captured in the region and often smuggled to Algeria, but also within Morocco to Moroccans and people from the Middle East. The species is very popular because of their distinctive appearance and pleasant song. The European Goldfinch is sold for 50 Euro a piece. People from Oujda come to capture them and sell them on the markets in Oujda (picture 5). According to Mr. Bachiri the species is under large pressure due to this trade.

Picture 5: European Goldfinch



3.9 TAFRAOUT

This is a sanctuary for boars and gazelles and a breeding center managed by Eaux et Forêts. In this region there are macaques, but they are all introduced in the past according to the person who showed us around. He claimed that recently 1 macaque died by an electric cable, one macaque was killed by visitors, 1 died a natural death, and 1 macaque was injured by a wild boar. No trade was confirmed here.

3.10 OUJDA

Oujda turned out to be a very important survey site for illegal trade in wildlife. The souk in Oujda was full of wild and domestic animals. We saw chameleons, (fighting) dogs, hedgehogs, cats, tortoise, different songbird species, falcons, buzzards, rabbits, weasels (picture 7) and Barbary squirrels (picture 6). There were no macaques openly for sale but after investigation it became apparent that the Barbary macaque trade is definitely higher in this city than in other survey sites.

Picture 6: Barbary squirrel (*Atlantoxerus getulus*)



Picture 7: Least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*)



The vendors told us that they had a macaque at home that was for sale at the time of the survey. They said that they don't keep the macaques openly on the markets because Eaux et Forêts would confiscate them. The macaques that are sold here come from Algeria (Lala Maghnia is the region where they are captured according to the vendors). They claim that it is cheaper to get the macaques from Algeria and it is easier to arrange than transporting them from the Azrou region. They sell the macaques for 2000 DH (200 Euro). 3 – 5 macaques per year are captured and sold from this souk. The buyers are mainly Moroccans living abroad. People have complained to the vendors that when macaque reaches adulthood they become aggressive, and there are cases where the owners of the macaques set them loose in the streets in Europe when this occurs. This is confirmed by sanctuaries in Europe who occasionally take macaques for shelter that were found in the streets in France or Belgium. We also found a man in the city on the streets with a Barbary macaque (coloured in *henna*) who asked money for showing his spectators his macaque doing tricks for entertainment (picture on cover). It was obvious that this man did not have a permit to this, as he walked away when we started asking questions.

The vendors on the souk told us that it is easy to cross the border to and from Algeria illegally to smuggle animals (macaques/ songbirds) or other products such as textile, gas or chemical products from Algeria to Morocco, because the products are much cheaper in Algeria. Tortoises are often smuggled from Morocco to Algeria. They also get their wild animals from the markets in Casablanca.

3.11 TAZZEKA NATIONAL PARK

We found no information about illegal wildlife trade or poaching in the Tazzeke National Park.

3.12 FEZ

In Fez we went to a macaque vendor that EvL knew from a previous survey and although the vendor did not have the macaques for sale openly anymore like he always did in the past, he still was an intermediate to buy macaques. He did however say that contrary to 2005, the authorities were stricter and no monkeys were openly sold anymore. So if one wanted to get hold of a macaque, they should order it from the Azrou region directly.

4 CONCLUSION

In general it can be concluded that the illegal trade in Barbary macaques is a lot less apparent in the north of Morocco than compared to the Middle Atlas region, Casablanca and the region of Marrakech. Tangier however remains an important illegal trade location because of its proximity to the ferry ports to Spain. The survey confirmed that most macaques for the illegal trade are still captured in the Azrou region near Parc National d'Ifrane. This survey is the first to confirm that macaques are also captured in Algeria for the illegal trade in Morocco.

Other wildlife however is sold widely throughout the north of Morocco. The wildlife is sold for national and international trade and for some species, even if they are not endangered, it causes pressure on its survival in local regions where poaching is high. Also many of these animals are kept in bad circumstances, often in small cages packed together in high uncomfortable temperatures. In 2011 a new law on the trade in wildlife was accepted and this law will be implemented and hopefully enforced in the near future. This more detailed law, as opposed to the former national legislation, will hopefully result in the decline of wildlife sold on the markets in Morocco, if enforcement is sufficiently implemented.

5 REPTILE TRADE IN MOROCCO

An abstract from: FOLKLORE, MYTH AND EXPLOITATION OF REPTILES IN MOROCCO

by Andy C. Highfield and Jane R. Bayley

Morocco possesses a wide range of herpetofauna. As this survey shows, reptiles are collected specifically for sale to tourists, but there are also many traditional forms of exploitation such as folk, medicine and magic. Folk-medicine using herbs and animal parts is often the only form of medical treatment readily available in rural North African society, and a belief in magic and witchcraft is also widespread. Many of these beliefs have changed little in centuries. Many of the herbal remedies are based upon a sound knowledge and understanding of a plant's chemical properties, and are surprisingly effective. Other, less well-founded beliefs, are attached to many animal components. It is therefore not surprising to encounter a variety of reptiles playing a role in this ancient system.

Chameleons

The chameleon, *Chamaeleo chamaeleo*, is often sold from traditional herbalists and spice stalls in souks. It is widely believed that this enigmatic creature possesses considerable powers of magic. In many places, the chameleon, although entirely harmless, is also greatly feared. It is widely accepted, for example, that its bite is invariably fatal. As a result, many people kill chameleons on sight. Wives who fear that their husbands may be straying often resort to the use of concealed chameleon meat or bones in their husband's food in the belief that this will restore his fidelity! The diet of chameleons themselves is also widely misunderstood, many stall-holders insisting that the creatures feed only upon mint leaves. Their true - insectivorous - nature is rarely recognised. As a consequence, few survive in captivity for long. A substantial number of chameleons are collected every year to supply the folklore and traditional medicine markets in Morocco; a brief survey of just one medium-sized souk revealed a total of 23 animals being offered for sale at two separate stalls.

Tortoises and terrapins

Although tortoises and terrapins do have uses in traditional medicine and magic in Morocco, the numbers utilised are limited compared to their exploitation for tourist souvenirs. Traditional beliefs about tortoises and terrapins vary considerably from one locality to another. It is generally agreed, however, that these animals should not be eaten routinely as their coprophagous, or dung-eating, habits render them 'unclean'

under Islamic tradition. Their eggs and flesh may be consumed as a medication for stomach complaints or as a treatment for fevers, however - a belief with a widespread following throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The blood of a tortoise is also believed to be a sure cure for warts. In some villages, it is believed that tortoises are dangerous, especially to children, and that a child hearing their hiss when disturbed may go blind. In such villages, tortoises are often killed whenever found, usually by crushing with a heavy rock. Other villages look upon tortoises with more favour, however, and believe that the tortoise's magic is stronger than that of serpents. Where this belief is prevalent tortoises are often kept as pets in the hope that their presence will discourage snakes from entering the house. Terrapins in particular are believed to play host to powerful djinns, or water spirits, especially those living in the vicinity of sacred springs. It is considered extremely bad luck to harm such a terrapin.

Utilisation of reptiles for tourist souvenirs

Tortoises form the major part of the souvenir market. Two particular forms of utilisation are especially common, and can be found in shops everywhere in Morocco, decorative fire-bellows using either one or two carapaces each and decorative banjo-like musical instruments, each using a single carapace as the resonator.

The intervening years have regrettably seen little evidence of any decline in the trade. Local people report that banjos made from carapaces are not a traditional item and that the trade began as a means of utilising the corpses of tortoises which perished prematurely during the bulk live export era (1947-1976). Some shops offer similar instruments made from gourds or from ceramic bowls. Trade in these sustainable and cruelty-free alternatives should be encouraged. That the trade in tortoise-derived souvenirs is having an extremely damaging effect upon surviving tortoise populations is beyond doubt and improved legislation to protect tortoises, together with education efforts aimed at persuading tourists not to purchase such objects, must rank as a major conservation priority within Morocco.

Whilst most traditional forms of utilisation do not at the present time form a direct threat to the survival of species, growing human populations are increasing the demand for such products. In combination with other pressures, such as habitat loss and the increased mechanisation of agriculture, however, even traditional forms of utilisation pose a threat in the long term. It is only by improving the public's understanding of reptiles that age-old beliefs can gradually be replaced by an awareness of these animal's vital role in the ecosystem. The harmless nature of most species also needs to be stressed, together with accurate information on how to avoid bites from venomous species and how to treat such bites should they occur. Fear and folklore needs to be displaced by factual knowledge. Public education, especially in schools and colleges is a high priority, and several such programs are now being undertaken. The impact of tourism is more acute. Very large numbers of reptiles, tortoises in particular, are presently being exploited for the sole purpose of supplying visitors with souvenirs or illegal pets. Again, public education is important, but this must be combined with effective deterrents aimed at illegal collectors and traders. If we are to preserve the unique herpetofauna of North Africa for future generations, these problems must be faced now, before it is too late.

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