

BARBARY MACAQUES EXPLOITED AS PHOTO-PROPS IN MARRAKESH'S PUNISHMENT SQUARE

In the ancient Moroccan city of Marrakesh, tourists are unwittingly helping the trade of Barbary macaques by having their photographs taken with them.

Vincent Nijman, Daniel Bergin and Els van Lavieren report for SWARA.





THE AUTHORS

Vincent Nijman is trained as a biologist and currently holds a professorial chair in anthropology at Oxford Brookes University. He has worked on a wide range of primates, from slow lorises and howler monkeys to macaques and orang-utans, but a significant chunk of his time is devoted to researching wildlife trade.

Email: vnijman@brookes.ac.uk

Daniel Bergin qualified as a safari guide before obtaining an MSc in Primate Conservation. He has researched wildlife trade in North Africa and is currently a consultant for TRAFFIC, investigating cross-border trade of terrestrial animals in Borneo.

Els van Lavieren has an MSc in Primate Conservation and is one of the founders and the Executive Director of the Moroccan Primate Conservation foundation (MPC). She has been working on Barbary macaque conservation in Morocco for more than 10 years, specializing in the illegal trade and active in the protection of the species' most important habitat in Morocco.

Email: els@mpcfoundation

Marrakesh is a medieval metropolis retaining much of its historic character. With Rabat as Morocco's capital, Fez as its spiritual centre and Casablanca attracting the more affluent visitors, in the years since independence, Marrakesh has carved out a role as the Nation's artistic place-to-be. In the 1960s and 1970s the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin joined the roving hippies who frequented the city, and Yves St Laurent found a home away from home in the Jardin Majorelle. Always cosmopolitan, Marrakesh truly opened its doors to the world in the 1990s when budget airlines made available to the masses what before was restricted to the happy few. In 2014 the city received over a million tourists.

To the first-time visitor Marrakesh is perhaps best described as an alleyway labyrinth designed by a town planner without a sense of direction, that is packed to the rim with people, shops and goods. The centre of town has always been the Djemaa el-Fna (*'Assembly of the Dead'*: here law breakers faced their ultimate punishment in public) and to this day this square is packed with salesmen, herbalists, food stalls, entertainers, and anyone willing to make or spend some money. Radiating out of the Djemaa el-Fna are a series of small alleyways and covered markets called souqs. At the Rahba Qedima potion sellers have plant-, animal- or mineral-based cures for every ailment, from broken fingers to broken hearts, as well as tonics that improves one's general health. Wool skeins are hung out to dry in the Souk Sebbaghine (*'Dyer's souq'*), and for some peace and quiet in between the Adhan (call for prayer) one has to visit the gardens of the Koutoubia Mosque to the southeast of the Djemaa el-Fna.

Besides its historic and hippy-ish appeal, Marrakesh also has the reputation of being

LEFT PAGE: Barbary macaques, dressed up and ready to have their photo to be taken, in the town of Meknes.

TOP: Barbary macaques used as photo-props on the Djemaa el-Fna in Marrakesh.

BELOW: Barbary macaque in Marrakesh.



PHOTOS BY: ELS VAN LAVIEREN



PHOTO BY: ELS VAN LAVIEREN

Barbary macaques and their transport cages in Marrakesh.

one of North Africa's largest centres of wildlife trade, with numerous species, protected or not, offered openly for sale¹. In the early 2000s researchers working on wild populations of spur-thighed tortoises *Testudo graeca* recorded almost 700 of these globally threatened animals for sale in Marrakesh². More recent report suggests that this trade continues, and boxes full of often-small tortoises are displayed in open plastic containers in front of the shops³. Leopard *Panthera pardus* skins are regularly observed on sale in Marrakesh⁴ even though the species is all but extinct in Morocco.

Based on a trip to the cities of Fez and Marrakesh in 2011, Martin and Perry⁵ gave a vivid account in SWARA how tourists underwrite Morocco's illegal

MARRAKESH ALSO HAS THE REPUTATION OF BEING ONE OF NORTH AFRICA'S LARGEST CENTRES OF WILDLIFE TRADE, WITH NUMEROUS SPECIES, PROTECTED OR NOT, OFFERED OPENLY FOR SALE.

trade in wildlife artefacts, including items made out of elephant ivory. They also mention the presence of Barbary macaques *Macaca sylvanus* being displayed by entertainers on the Djemaa el-Fna. Tourists may want to take a photograph of the monkeys and by paying for this, tourists keep the entertainers in business. Primates used as photo-props brings back memories to the beach chimpanzees *Pan troglodytes* in Spain that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s and that were subsequently banned, but to this day the primate photo-prop trade continues in Asia (e.g. slender

¹Bergin, D. & Nijman, V. (2014) Open, unregulated trade in wildlife in Morocco's markets. *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 26: 65-70.

²Znari, M., Germano, D.J. & Macé, J.C. (2005). Growth and population structure of the Moorish tortoise (*Testudo graeca graeca*) in westcentral Morocco: possible effects of over-collecting for the tourist trade. *Journal of Arid Environments* 62: 55-74.

³Bergin, D., Gray, M. & Nijman, V. (2015). Marrakesh: a centre for tortoise trade. *Oryx* 49: 205.

⁴Shipp, A. (2002) Wildlife for sale in Marrakech, Morocco. *Traffic Bulletin* 19: 65.

⁵Martin, E. & Perry-Martin, C. (2012). Tourists underwrite Morocco's illegal trade in wildlife artefacts. *Swara* (Jul-Sep): 16-29.



PHOTO BY: RONALD TROOSTWIJK

lories *Loris lydekkerianus* in India⁶, lar gibbons *Hylobates lar* and slow lorises *Nycticebus ssp* in Thailand⁷, and Philippine tarsiers *Carlito syrichta* in the southern Philippines⁸). In Africa this practise seems to be confined to Morocco and the Barbary macaque.

The Barbary macaque is the only African member of a widespread Asian genus. The species is confined to parts of Morocco and Algeria (and a small introduced population in Gibraltar on mainland Europe), but in the past it occurred throughout northern Africa and parts of Europe. Its population is highly fragmented, and with the most

recent population estimates from Algeria of around 5,500 individuals, dating back to the 1970s, the largest stronghold of the species is in Morocco. Estimates from Morocco are more recent and it is thought that a population of around 6,000 individuals remains⁹.

Trade is recognized as one of the major threats to the species, with again the most recent data originating mainly from Morocco¹⁰. Trade in Barbary macaques is to fulfil the demand for pets and the entertainment industry (tourism) and, as such, is almost exclusively focused on the younger individuals. Indeed, opportunistic observations from wild populations suggest that it is this age group that is most often extracted from the wild. The trade in Moroccan Barbary macaques is to supply domestic demand whereas the international trade is largely directed towards Europe; the majority ends up in Spain, France and the Netherlands,

Local and international tourists take the opportunity to have their photo taken with the globally threatened Barbary macaque.

⁶Kanagavel, A., Sinclair, C., Sekar, R., Raghavan, R. (2013) Moolah, misfortune or spinsterhood? the plight of slender loris *Loris lydekkerianus* in southern India. *Journal Threatened Taxa* 5: 3585–3588.

⁷Osterberg, P. & Nekaris, K.A.I. (2015) The use of animals as photo props to attract tourists in Thailand: a case study of the slow loris *Nycticebus ssp*. *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 27: 13-18.

⁸Yang-Martinez, S. (2011). An investigation of tarsier tourism in Bohol, Philippines: assessments of 11 tarsier exhibits, a worry for tarsier welfare and conservation. MSc thesis. Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.

⁹El Alami, A., van Lavierien, E., Aboufatima, R. & Chait, A. (2013). A survey of the Endangered Barbary macaque *Macaca sylvanus* in the Central High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. *Oryx* 47: 451-456.

¹⁰Van Lavierien, E. (2008). The illegal trade in Barbary macaques from Morocco. *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 21:81-88.

coinciding with the Moroccan diaspora. This trade is illegal (**see Box on Legislation**)

Over the last decade, the use of Barbary macaques for photo-props in Marrakesh has increased from one group of vendors using one or two macaques to four groups of vendors displaying up to nine macaques openly at any given time. As of 2013 some 35 Barbary macaques are kept on and around the Djemaa el-Fna for the photo-prop and pet trade. In 2014 another group of photo-prop vendors have set up shop in the town of Meknes, 400 km northeast of Marrakesh. In addition, in recent years the link between macaques being used as photo-props and them being sold

as pets has become more clear. Given that the species is protected and there are no provisions in Moroccan law to use macaques for display purposes, the activities on the square are illegal. The majority of visitors to the Djemaa el-Fna square are Moroccan, and indeed they are the ones that have their photo taken with macaques most frequently, next to visitors from Western Europe. The price one has to pay for having one's picture taken differs widely (and depends on one's bargaining skills) but typically up to 100 Dirham(\$10) exchanges hands.

The places where Barbary macaques are displayed for the photo-prop trade are known to be centres of wildlife trade. It is ironic that Djemaa el-Fna in the past was the place where

lawbreakers faced their punishment in public, and that this same place is now where the law is broken on a daily basis. Shutting down these wildlife markets in cities such as Marrakesh and acting upon those that openly tout the macaques and prosecuting traders to the full extent of the law may be difficult to achieve but is essential in improving the conservation prospects of Barbary macaques. Central in this is a focus on taking appropriate enforcement actions in line with Morocco's domestic legislation as well as respecting the rules and intentions of international conventions to which Morocco is signatory. ●

LEGISLATION

The Barbary macaque has been protected under a general national hunting law. In 2015 however, a new law (Loi 29-05 Relative à la Protection des Espèces de Faune et de Flore Sauvages) will be implemented that will regulate the trade in wild animals and plant species. The High Commissary of Water and Forests plans to announce a 6 months grace period in which the public will have the chance to end their current activities of using and selling wildlife without being prosecuted. The government has until now turned a blind eye to the illegal activities connected to wildlife use, but with the implementation of the new law, they want to initiate enforcement. It is not clear yet when the new law will be announced officially. The decree contains a list of species of wild fauna and flora involved in the provision of this Act and the terms of issue of permits, certificates and authorizations for the import, export, re-export, possession, collection, introduction and reintroduction into the wild of these species. The fines when the law is violated are directly linked to their listing on the Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): the fines for CITES Appendix I species are higher than those for CITES Appendix II species (i.e. 3,000-10,000 euro vs 2,000-5,000 euro).

The Barbary macaque is included on Appendix II of the CITES, strictly regulating international trade. Morocco ratified CITES in 1978. Commercial trade of wild-caught individuals is permitted if and when the CITES authorities in the range countries can establish so-called Non-detriment Findings that sets clear boundaries on the number of individuals that can be taken. For Barbary macaques this is largely irrelevant given that the species is protected in all of its three range countries (Morocco, Algeria, Gibraltar) and as such no domestic nor international trade should take place. Given the higher fines for Appendix I listed species compared to Appendix II listed species, several national and international NGOs have been arguing for proposals to be submitted to the CITES Conference of Parties to allow Barbary macaques to be transferred to Appendix I.

