

Tunisia's Wildlife

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Early in 1972 the author visited Tunisia at the request of the British Council to study all aspects of nature conservation. This article is a brief résumé of his report.

Tunisia has recently been successful in improving the status of one severely endangered mammal, the Atlas deer or Barbary stag *Cervus elaphus barbarus*, a red deer subspecies whose entire population is found in the dense oak forests on the Algerian-Tunisian frontier. Numbers were very low indeed before 1966, when a few individuals, severely persecuted on the Algerian side, took refuge in the forests on the Tunisian side. In January 1966, the Forest Service, helped by the German-Tunisian Society, fenced a large area of forest at El Feidja, near Ghardimaou, and a number of deer were driven in under the supervision of Herr Hugo Fenzl, a local resident.* A smaller enclosure was also made at Ain Bacouch near Tabarka. Since then, with complete protection, the deer have increased considerably, both inside and outside the fenced areas. The exact number today is not known, but various estimates put it at 300+, and their future now looks much brighter.

Another interesting example of the protection of a relict population is that of Cuvier's or the mountain gazelle *Gazella cuvieri*, which occurs on the Djebel Chambi and the nearby forest of Kechem el Kelb near Kasserine where some 100 animals live on the rocky hillsides in open Aleppo pine forest. In both these areas protection is possible because the land is state forest controlled by the Direction des Forêts. Further south protection of the Barbary sheep and Dorcas gazelle, which live in the semi-arid country bordering the Sahara, is much more difficult and both species are poached, the sheep for its excellent meat. In this part of the country where the population is nomadic or semi-nomadic, there are also problems of overgrazing by camels and goats.

There is a growing awareness in Tunisia of the need to conserve the country's rich natural resources, and active steps are being taken to protect the numerous vegetation types and wildlife habitats together with the mammals and birds which occur in them. These range from moist oak forests in the north-west to desert in the south, with brackish lakes and salt lakes, which are the home of countless numbers of waterfowl, in the east and south.

At Bou Hedma, between Sfax and Gafsa, the Government has established a national park of 16,000 ha to protect the local fauna and also the relict forest of *Acacia tortilis*. Both the Barbary sheep and Dorcas gazelle are found here, but protection is extremely difficult in view of the rugged terrain and the fact that the park is still subject to grazing and some cultivation by nomads. A lot remains to

* See *Oryx*, December 1966, page 334.

be done to secure complete protection before Bou Hedma can claim to be a national park in more than name.

Although half Tunisia is desert, the country has a wide range of habitats—forests, steppes, hills, freshwater and saline lakes and shorelines—and an abundant variety of birds. The greater flamingo occurs in large numbers, both as a winter visitor and as a breeding species. The white stork is a summer visitor, as in Europe, the common crane a winter visitor, and there are spoonbills, cattle egrets, little egrets, glossy ibis and avocets, to name but a few. Many species of duck winter in great numbers—especially pintail, wigeon, pochard, mallard, and tufted duck; the white-headed duck is a resident species. In winter greylag geese visit the fresh-water Lac Ichkeul in thousands. Raptors include golden eagle, Bonelli's and short-toed eagles, griffon vulture, black kite, peregrine, Barbary and lanner falcons, Eleonora's falcon, kestrel, sparrowhawk, and eagle owl.

Hunting Regulations

Responsibility for the protection of mammals and birds is vested in the Direction des Forêts, and within this the Service de la Chasse is concerned with all hunting and shooting, the enforcement of shooting regulations and the close seasons for game. Shooting is a popular sport, and there are shooting clubs in different parts of the country with their own club buildings, and even with small zoos where representative examples of the country's fauna can be seen. The clubs play a valuable part in promoting conservation since their members have no wish to see game animals and birds decimated by poachers.

The Service de la Chasse, which has officers and guards stationed in many parts of the country, is being enlarged and strengthened. At Korbus, in the Cap Bon peninsula near Tunis, the Direction des Forêts maintains a rearing-station for the Barbary partridge, the chief game bird, and nearby at Dar Chichou is a herd of some 33 Asiatic buffaloes, the remnants of a wild herd which formerly lived in the swamps of Lac Ichkeul, near Bizerta, where they were introduced in the 18th century by the then Bey of Tunis.

Wild boar are abundant in the forests, and drives organised by the Service de la Chasse are popular with German tourists. Other game includes hares, sand grouse and wildfowl. Shooting is totally prohibited in several areas, for example at the Lac de Tunis, which holds an amazing variety of bird life, particularly flamingoes and migratory ducks in the winter. All birds except game birds are protected.

At Tabarka in the north-west a forestry training school has been developed as a joint Swiss-Tunisian project. The syllabus contains a course on shooting and hunting control, with emphasis on conservation.

In addition to these official activities, unofficial interest in conservation is represented by the recently formed Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement,

whose president is Dr Zakaria Ben Mustapha, himself a marine biologist. The Association's first aim is the establishment of a Natural History Museum at Tunis which would act as a centre for meetings, lectures and the dissemination of information, as well as housing examples of Tunisian fauna and flora. An ornithological research station on the Lac de Tunis directed by a French ornithologist, M. Inex Lachaux, is sponsored by the Ministère de l'Éducation de la Jeunesse et des Sports de Tunisie. Conservation matters and natural history are given good coverage by Tunisian television and by the press, which gave considerable publicity to the Stockholm Conference.

To sum up: wildlife conservation is still in its early stages in Tunisia, but an encouraging beginning has been made, and the next few years should show some significant development.

Endangered in Britain

A working party, on which the FPS is represented along with other major organisations, has been set up to advise the British National Appeal of the WWF on grants to save endangered animal and plant species in the British Isles. The BNA has a substantial sum earmarked for this purpose and grants will be made to finance surveys, research and similar activities—not to buy land for which there are other sources. The Hon. Secretary, Richard Fitter, represents the FPS on the committee; the chairman is Dr Bruce Forman of the Nature Conservancy. Even before the WWF grant the need for such a group had become clear, and the committee's objects are defined as to develop a rationale for the conservation of British endangered species; to promote action through existing organisations; and to suggest priorities for the allocation of funds. Societies and individuals are invited to submit projects for the committee's consideration, bearing in mind the scope of its operations.

Catching South American Monkeys

A detailed account of how forest monkeys in Peru are captured for the trade is given by Pekka Soini, of Iquitos, in *The International Zoo Yearbook* Vol. 12. Village trappers usually take the young of wild adults they shoot down with either firearms or a blowgun and poisoned darts; these animals are then collected by the 'river pedlars' who travel the Amazon stream penetrating to the remotest villages buying and selling. Professional trappers, however, are more efficient, using food baits to get monkeys into large cages, driving monkeys into 100-metre-long nylon nets which they stretch across the inside of a river bend, and even making the monkeys drunk by giving them bananas soaked in a local rum until they fall asleep or drop out of the trees and are easily caught.

There are other valuable and revealing articles in this first section of the yearbook on South American primates in captivity including one on Brazil by Dr Ademar Coimbra-Filho, who is the moving figure in the effort to save the golden lion marmoset in the wild, and, rather surprisingly, one by a well known and controversial trapper and trader, Mike Tsalickis of Leticia, in Colombia. The reference section contains all the useful information that users of the Yearbook have become accustomed to, including a census of rare animals in captivity. Published by the Zoological Society of London at £8 (\$21) this volume is jointly edited by Joseph Lucas and Nicole Duplax-Hall.