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Abstract: In the heading about the depletion of Moroccan game, the author mentioned the cheetah disappearance (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*), which was still present up to 40 years ago in the mountainous massifs bordering the Sahara.

Dans le paragraphe sur la diminution du gibier au Maroc, l'auteur mentionne la disparition du guépard (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*), qui était encore présent il y a plus de 40 ans dans les massifs montagneux bordant le Sahara.

Evolution and Protection of the Wild Life of Morocco

Written and illustrated by

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Causes of the regression of wild life in Morocco

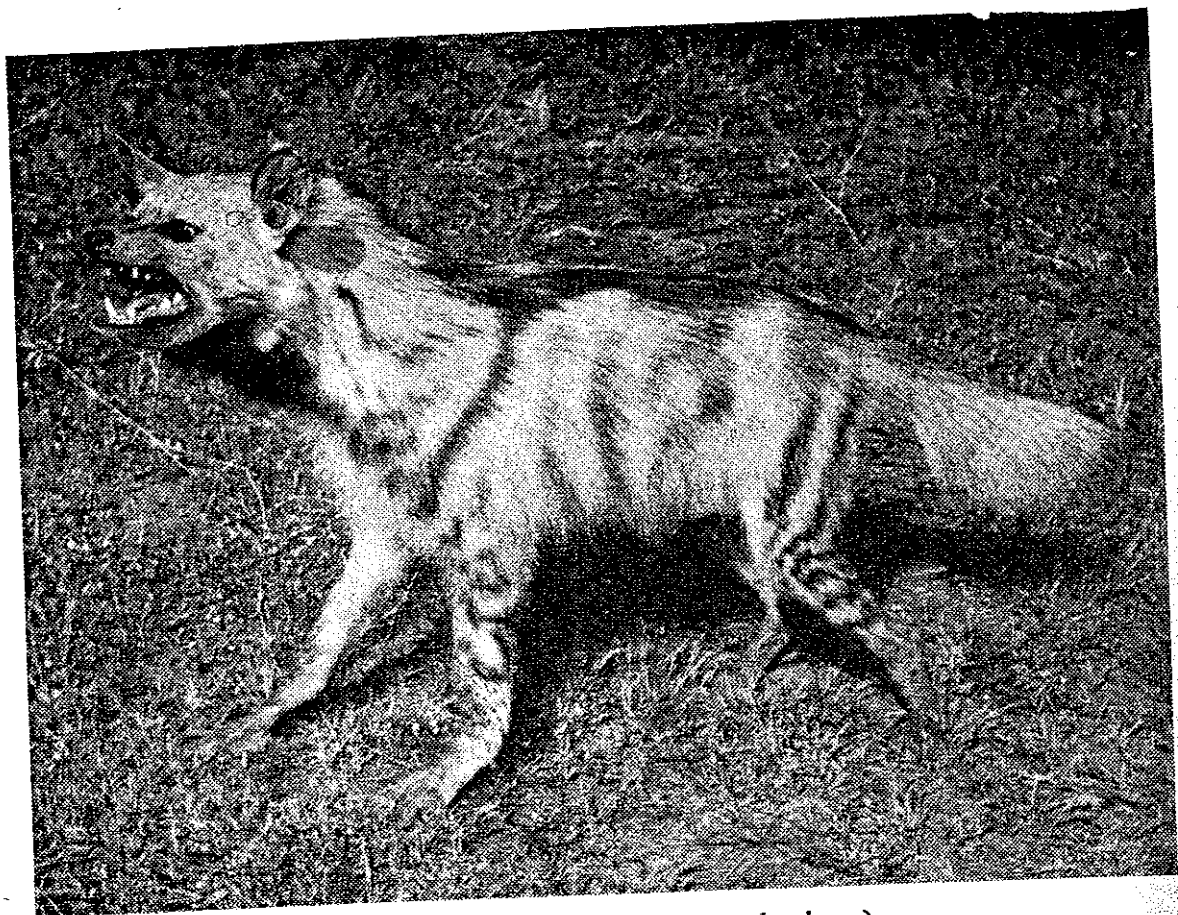
THE wild life of Morocco has retrogressed considerably during the last few decades, a state of affairs common to most countries which have a large native population, and which are in the course of being developed and modernised.

The causes of this evolution or regression are numerous. Of the greatest consequence is the very rapid improvement of the land, resulting in the destruction of large tracts of bush country, where the wild life and game-birds have been accustomed to find the peace and shelter necessary for their survival.

Poaching (trapping and collecting of eggs) has always existed, but whereas it was not very dangerous whilst it was carried on in comparative moderation, its adverse effects increased materially with the rise in population and the consequently ever-growing needs of new and large towns. Modern cultivation methods, the use of insecticides, the progressive expansion of the areas given over to the grazing of continually expanding herds of domestic stock, all played their rôle in reducing the number of game animals and in driving them back into isolated and remote regions. Finally, hunters, whose numbers shot up from 5,000 to 25,000 in some 25 years, exploited to the full their cynegetic heritage, which they thought to be inexhaustible, in view of its extraordinary richness, even as recently as thirty years ago.

The depletion of Moroccan game

In Morocco, as in other countries, the recent extinction of a number of representatives of the primitive fauna is to be deplored. Thus the Atlas Lion, whose survival was assisted by the protection afforded by the high mountains of Morocco, disappeared completely at the beginning of the century; legendary animal, it is now no more than a memory still vivid in the minds of the old herdsmen and in the folklore of the Berbers and of the Arabs. In the obituary of animals which have become extinct must be included the Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus hecki*), which was still present up to 40 years ago in the mountainous massifs bordering the Sahara. As to the North African Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus*), large antelope of the desert steppes—steppes drenched by the sun of Eastern Morocco—its last representatives were killed between 1920 and 1930. It appears that we also have to acknowledge the disappearance of the Mohor (*Gazella dama mohorr*), which twenty years ago was still met with sporadically by herdsmen looking for pasturage in the pre-saharan wadis, as far as the Dra.



Striped Hyena (*Hyena hyena barbara*)

At the moment the existence of some other species is also being threatened, especially that of the largest Moroccan carnivore, the Leopard (*Panthera pardus panthera*). Were it not for the stringent protective measures which have been taken, it is quite probable that there would not be a single survivor of this magnificent cat, whose occasional misdeeds do not justify the thoughtless destruction by hunters coveting its beautifully spotted coat. It was also found necessary to protect the large Berber Hyena (*Hyena hyena barbara*), whose bad reputation was likewise exaggerated; similarly the Caracal of North Africa (*Felis caracal algerus*), found only in a few localities, warranted special protection. Whereas the Dorcas Gazelle still maintains itself throughout its area of dispersion, despite grave and useless destruction, the Mountain Gazelle (*Gazella gazella cuvieri*) is only to be found in a few stark hilly or mountainous habitats. That striking specimen of the mountain fauna of Morocco, the Mouflon or Barbary Sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*) has fallen to the poachers' guns in such numbers during the last few years that its disappearance in the near future is likewise feared.

Some species of birds, slow breeders or of heavy flight, also have been unable to withstand the destruction by sportsmen and by poachers. Thus the Guinea-fowl (*Numida meleagris sabyi*) is no longer found except in a few inaccessible wooded ravines, where it has found its last refuge. That other fine game-bird, the Francolin (*Francolinus bicalcaratus ayesha*) has only managed to survive to the present day due to the measure of protection accorded to it. The Giant paauw or Kori bustard (*Choriotis arabs*) and the

Houbara bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*) enjoy a similar protection and survival.

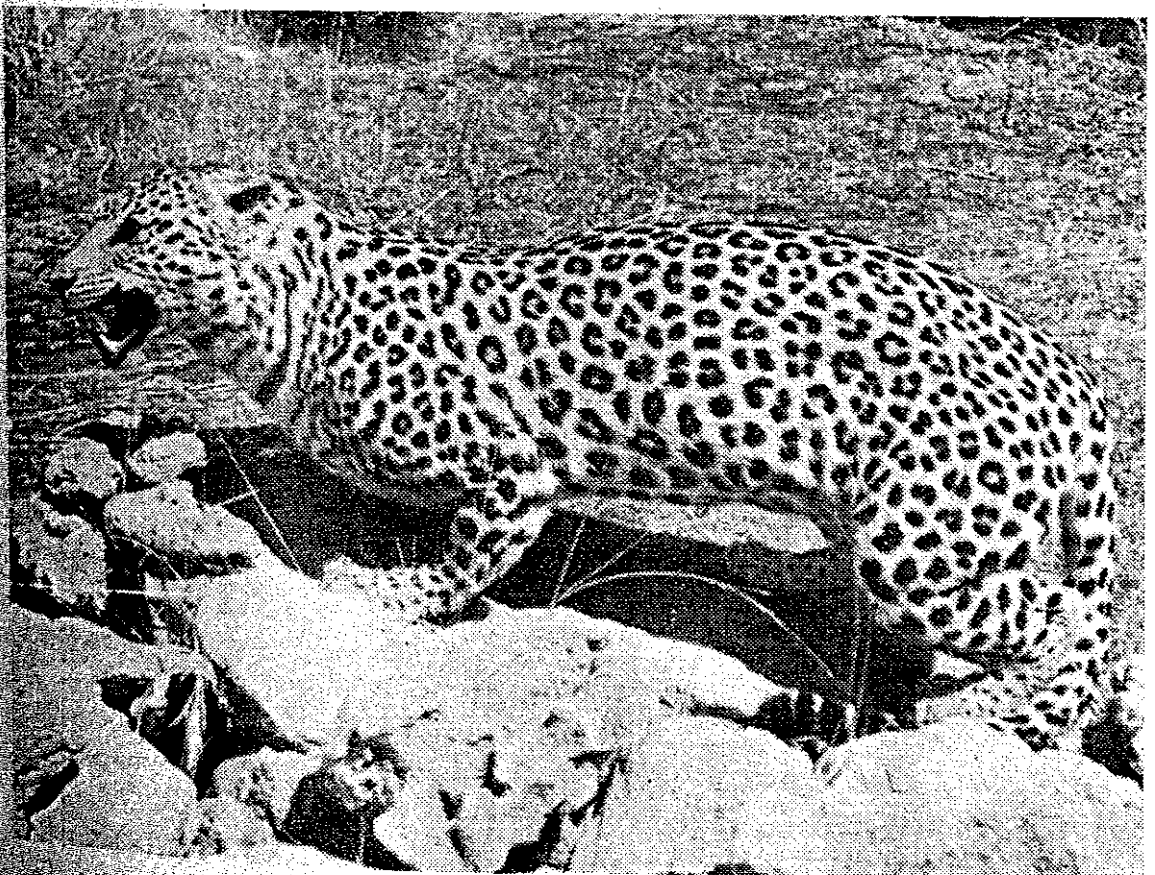
Finally, although their ultimate existence is not threatened as yet, the greater part of the sedentary game animals, such as the hare, the *gambra* partridge and the grouse, show a marked decrease, in so far as they have practically disappeared from large portions of the plains. The times are past when the sportsmen could boast of a bag of dozens of partridge, francolin and other game.

Protective Measure for the Terrestrial Fauna

The principal legislative and administrative ordinances relating to the protection of the Fauna:—

The act of 21st July, 1923, creating Game Wardens, was the first indication given by the legislators and by public authorities that they were interested in the Moroccan wild life, and more especially so in the game. Later the decree of 6th August, 1949, introduced into the legislation a series of enacting clauses aimed at ensuring not only the conservation of game but also of rare and useful species; this decree even places restrictions on the destruction of animals reported to be harmful, of which it gives a very specific list. Finally, hunting licences are issued each year according to the local increases in the game species.

Concern for the protection of the fauna is also included in the two acts of 11th and 26th September, 1934, relating to the establishment of National Parks. Furthermore, a decree of 2nd September,



Morocco Leopard (*Felis panthera pardus*)



Caracal (*Felis caracal algerus*)

1922, restricts the use of poisonous and of toxic substances, notably strychnine, arsenic and the organo-phosphates, by restricting their legitimate use to the destruction of a very limited number of animals harmful to agriculture.

Principal provisions of Moroccan Law relating to the protection of Wild Life:

Of particular interest are the provisions concerning the control of hunting and of the sale of venison. The principle of ownership carrying the right to hunt has made it possible to formulate excellent laws, laws aimed at protecting not only wild life but also the true sportsman.

As in most other countries, hunting is prohibited except during specified periods, periods fixed for each kind of game; thus sedentary game (partridge, wild hare) may only be hunted during three months of the year, the Plains or Dorcas Gazelle during five days only, and aquatic and migratory birds, only from mid-September to the beginning of March.

The methods of and instruments for hunting, usually disallowed, snares or traps, lights, coursings, nooses, drugs, viruses or any baits intended to intoxicate or to kill the game, etc. With the exception of the wild boar, hunting *en battue* is not allowed and even boar hunting only during specific periods and only with due permission. The use of ferrets and of Sloughis (a local race of greyhound) is not

allowed, nor is it permitted to use the aeroplane, motor-car, or, generally speaking, any animal or motor-drawn vehicle to capture, chase, pull down or to shoot at game.

All these restrictions listed are in no way uncommon, but there are others included in Moroccan law which are not encountered elsewhere except in one or two instances:— thus certain species of game, e.g. the partridge, the hare and the wild boar are only allowed to be hunted during their respective open seasons, on Thursdays and Sundays.

The hunting of the Dorcas Gazelle is confined to five days of the year.

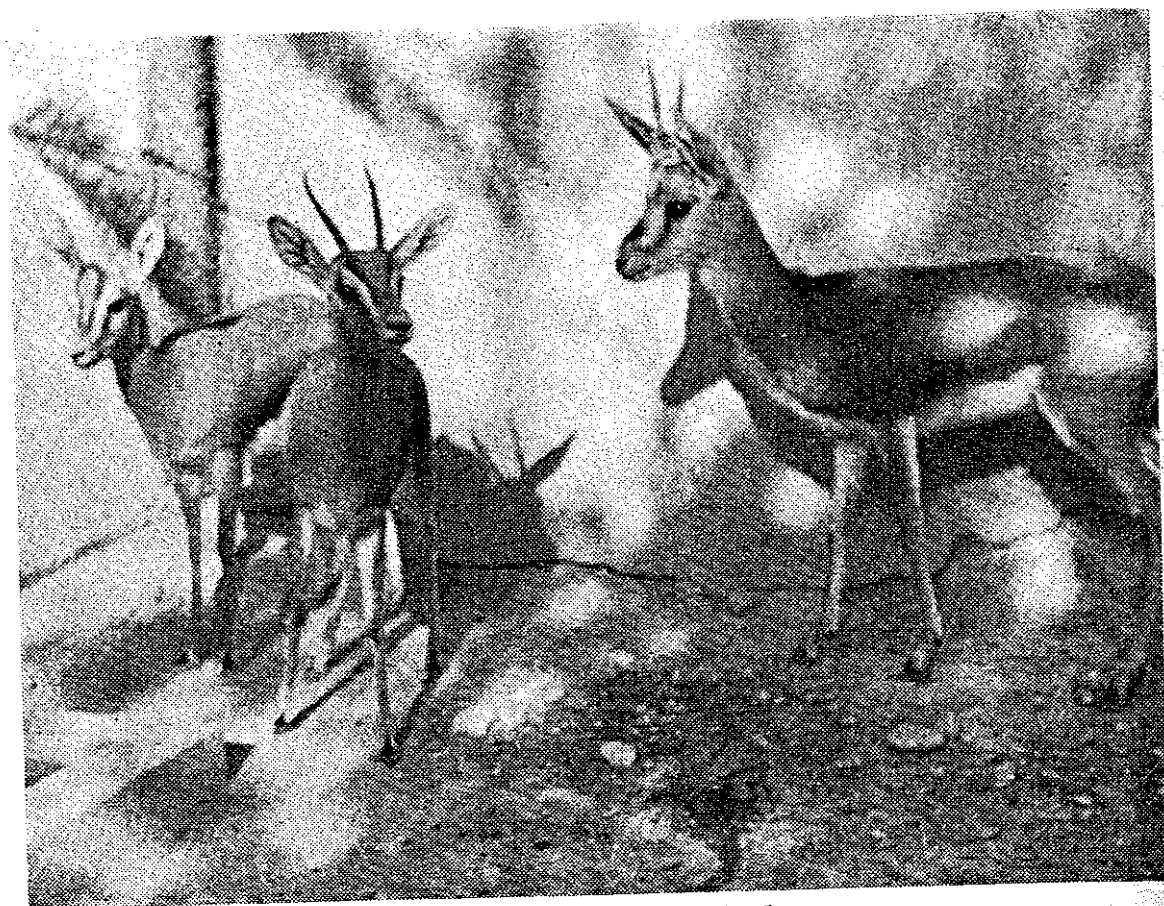
Also the hunter is limited in his bag, for any one day, to a small number of head of certain species, e.g., 8 partridges, one hare and one gazelle.

The law prohibits the display for sale, the selling and the buying, as also the serving in restaurants and hotels, of the majority of the sedentary game (partridge, hare, gazelle and wild boar) and *a fortiori* of protected game.

Each year, of the 45 million hectares of Crown lands, about eight million are set aside for restoration. Lastly, as much to counter the present day easy accessibility to hunting as to encourage private initiative, the owners of rural properties have the right to forbid all hunting on their lands, the right to lease their lands for hunting under reservation of strict application of the terms of contract, which fix not only the rights conceded, but also the conditions of the cynegetic use of the said lands.

The laws relating to hunting contain provisions aimed at protecting not only game but also other wild fauna. Thus the act of the 6th August, 1949, prohibits the capture and the destruction, at all times and in all localities, and by whatever methods, of all migrant pigeons and of useful or rare birds; these latter (birds of prey, diurnal and nocturnal, scansores, passereries and palmipeds) are published in a list (too long to be enumerated in this article) comprising more than 70 species. As mentioned above, certain game-birds threatened with extinction, e.g. the Francolin, the Guinea-fowl, the Giant bustard and the Houbara bustard, enjoy total protection; total protection is even extended to animals reputed to be harmful, e.g., the Hyaena and the Caracal; since three years ago it is also forbidden to shoot the Mountain Gazelle and the Barbary sheep; lastly the Leopard, of which, at most, but sixty head remain, which finds its refuge in the remote and wild parts of the country, may not be killed except when it constitutes an imminent and real danger for man or for his domestic stock, and even in these circumstances the hunter may not keep the skin, except upon payment to the state of 100,000 francs.

The eradication of undesirable animals, or of animals assumed to be such, is often the cause of wholesale destruction; to forestall such mistakes the State has taken the precaution to draw up an exact list of the animals reputed to be harmful (e.g. jackal, fox, weasel, certain field mice, etc.). Furthermore these vermin may not



The Plains Gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*)

be destroyed except by the landowners and then only on their own lands. Lastly the law strictly controls the use of poisons and forbids the destruction by firing, or by the use of virus or bacterial preparations.

Even more stringent restrictions are applied to game animals (hare, wild boar, etc.) which are capable of damaging the crops. Landowners may not destroy these without permission from the local Administration, which prescribes the methods to be used.

Finally, it may be noted that the question of creating natural faunistic Reserves has had its foundation laid by the establishment of two National Parks, with a total surface of 35,000 hectares. In these parks it is forbidden to hunt or in any way to molest wild animal life.

Conclusions:

Thus, as we have seen, Morocco has a complete and well-knit set of laws controlling the terrestrial fauna. Nevertheless, the measures taken should not have to rely solely on laws and measures of restraint and repression. All such action, not accompanied by the mass conscience of the free will of the people, would inevitably lead to futility and failure.

Direction has been given and it now only remains for the educators to awaken interest in the subject, especially amongst the children, for unless these legislative measures are thoroughly understood from school years onwards, they will have a very restricted influence on the respect for wild life and the love of nature. It is this task which is occupying the attention of public authorities at the moment.