The First BMCRif Football Tournament

It was a busy autumn for BMCRif staff last year. Our First BMCRif Football Tournament was held in October and was a huge success. Four teams took part and the victors were Moulay Abdsalom. They were presented by a trophy provided by the Tetouan Football Association. The t-shirts were so popular that we ran out of children’s sizes and had to give adult t-shirts to even very small boys to avoid them being disappointed.

BMCRif launched its adult and child awareness campaign on the day of the football tournament so every participant and supporter was given a BMCRif t-shirt, cloth bag and information leaflet. The information leaflet is for local people in Bouhachem who encounter the macaques daily. However, it is also proving popular with people in the city too. The leaflet has been read out in every village mosque in Bouhachem and some individuals have changed their behaviour as a result of its contents. This campaign was supported by Zoo Barcelona and this support continues in 2011 with the arrival of our new Education and Awareness Officer, Sonia Moles.
Bouhachem Dog Health Programme – Tamlin Watson

The programme was a complete success with a 100% uptake of rabies vaccinations from dog owners in three villages of Bouhachem, Lahcen, Talyamen and Tayenza. The first two are typical villages in the Bouhachem region, consisting of roughly 40 homes where the majority of villagers own dogs for livestock guarding. Tayenza is a group of small villages spread out over a vast area and is the most difficult area to cover as it takes all day to vaccinate dogs in just one small part.

Although we had full support from local people, not all dogs could be vaccinated. Most dogs have received no previous handling or had suffered rough handling in the past and were too frightened of their owners to be caught or, once caught, were too frightened to be held long enough to be vaccinated. Animals that were too ill, too young, too old or pregnant could not be vaccinated. Any other animals that missed the vaccinations had already left to perform their guarding duties in the forest with the shepherds. All dogs vaccinated were marked with spray, and their owners were asked to attach a collar to their dog (coloured to mark the village they were from). Although it was impossible to vaccinate some dogs, all dogs were successfully treated for parasites by being offered a ball of potato containing de-worming tablets sufficient for each animal.

We developed educational materials for distribution to everyone we encountered and they were also distributed to local schools and mosques. The leaflet describes how to deal with bites using materials that are available to people in these remote areas. It also gives a brief description of rabies and the programme BMCRif is implementing.

Very sadly, just a week before the immunisation programme began, someone actually died of rabies in one of the target villages. This highlights the importance of continuing rabies vaccinations and expanding the programme into surrounding villages so that the human population as well as the macaques can be protected from this horrific disease.

BMCRif is pleased to cooperate with the Moroccan Veterinary authority who provided the rabies vaccines and we would like to thank Dr Rachid Belyasmine and Dr El Aoini ben Aissa for their invaluable assistance. BMCRif volunteer, Sonia Moles Poveda provided valuable veterinary assistant skills. We are very grateful to Lush Charity Pot UK for their generous support of the programme.
Why Are We Working with Dogs & Football?

Why are we concerned with dogs and football when we are working in conservation? BMCRif is a holistic conservation project which identifies and tries to treat the cause of a problem and not just its symptoms. We believe that this approach may take longer to achieve results but these results will last much longer and result in positive outcomes for people and wildlife in the area.

During our work, we have discovered that dogs are the main macaque predators. We also discovered that dogs from nearby villages form packs to hunt in the forest. Everyone thinks that these dogs are feral but, in fact, they have owners. The dogs are not fed well so form packs to go hunting for food. Unfortunately, as well as killing macaques, they also sometimes kill cows grazing in the mountains. The Dog Health Programme began as an attempt to persuade local people to re-evaluate their attitudes towards their dogs and thus improve dog welfare. However, we subsequently discovered that rabies is a very big problem in the area, so the rabies vaccination programme will benefit both dogs and people.

Football is used by many conservation projects to deliver a conservation message in an enjoyable way. The boys who attended the tournament all wear their t-shirts proudly to school and stop to tell us when they have seen macaques. Many of these little boys will work as shepherds one day, so it is important that they associate the macaques with something they enjoy like football. The adult t-shirts are given to shepherds from other villages and we are often approached by their friends who also want a t-shirt. These are apparently seen as a status symbol even though they have a macaque on the front. Macaques were seen as objects of amusement when we first started our work here but attitudes appear to be changing for the better.

In all these activities, BMCRif’s logo and staff are the connection between the Barbary macaques and the people. It is vital to ensure that the villagers do not believe that we think the macaques are more important than them. These activities are basic and cost effective but the benefits to people and animals which result are very valuable. In addition, everyone is invited to participate which is much appreciated by the villagers. In the future we hope to deliver further cost-effective activities which deliver benefits to local people and to the conservation of the Barbary macaque.
The Barbary Macaques
Autumn saw another good crop of acorns so the macaques prepared well for the winter by gaining as much weight as possible. Sadly, many of the infants born in the spring did not survive the summer. This may be normal for the macaques in Bouhachem but further research is required before we can say if this is what happens every year or if the very hot and dry summer was a factor.

In January, BMRif expanded its study and began to survey the inhospitable calcareous massif of El Ghorghiz and Jbel Kelti. We recently discovered that there is small-scale trade in infant macaques which are captured in this area so it is vital we start working here so that we eradicate that trade. The photos show the tough nature of this area where macaques are expert at scaling cliffs. Luckily Ahmed El Harrad has spent a lot of time in this area and is well known to the local people – he is very interested in the macaques and their inhospitable environment.

This month has seen the first births of the spring – it’s a stressful time for the groups as they not only have the new infants to watch out for they also have to protect the youngsters from last year when there is danger from dogs or people.

Forest Fire
Fire is one of the worst things that can happen in the forests of Bouhachem because it completely destroys all the vegetation over a large area which will not regenerate without human intervention. In April, Ahmed and Mohamed were in the forest when they saw smoke. They rushed to the area where they discovered a forest fire. They acted quickly and called for help. Along with officers of the Water & Forests department and local villagers it took six hours to put the fire out. The fire happened in one of our study group’s areas and could have destroyed a large area if it had not been seen in time.

Facebook
Don’t forget to join our Facebook group if you have a Facebook page - Barbary Macaque Conservation in the Rif
http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=108304019192845. We now have over 600 members. Please join us or, if you are already a member, then please invite your friends to join too and help us give the Barbary macaque a higher profile in Morocco and in the rest of the world.
Barbary Macaque Conservation in the Rif (BMCRif) – Mission Statement

This interdisciplinary conservation project focuses on the Barbary macaque (Macaca sylvanus) with its enormous potential to act as a flagship species for the threatened flora, fauna and fungi of the unique and diverse ecosystems of northern Morocco. This project aims to halt the decline of the Barbary macaque in northern Morocco by gathering scientific data, raising awareness, and working with local and national stakeholders to develop a long term management plan to safeguard the species, its habitats, and the livelihoods of the local people.

Who We Are

Project Director - Siân Waters
Siân is from South Wales (UK) and has worked with wildlife for over 20 years specializing in primate & carnivore conservation. She is a member of the IUCN/SSC Primate & Reintroduction Specialist Groups and an honorary research associate of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and is based in the Department of Anthropology, Durham University UK.

Deputy Director - Ahmed El Harrad
Ahmed has been working with the project since its start in 2004. His hobbies are outdoor sports in the mountains and he is the founder and President of the Friends of Mountaineering and Outdoor Activities in Tetouan.

Education & Awareness Officer - Sonia Moles.
From Barcelona, Sonia is a qualified teaching and veterinary assistant. Sonia inoculated 250 dogs during the first stage of the Dog Health Project and also worked hard in the field collecting data. She has lots of ideas for informative and interactive lesson plans.

Dog Health Programme Officer - Tamlin Watson
Tamlin is an animal behaviourist with a wealth of experience in the area of animal welfare in the UK. She has also worked on donkey and horse welfare projects in Egypt.

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