

Apes on The Rock

John Emmanuel Fa



Barbary macaques have been on Gibraltar continuously for 240 years, maybe longer. Today they are a major tourist attraction – 1000 people may visit them in a day. But they have caused much trouble in the past, raiding gardens, damaging houses, biting people. Since 1913, with few breaks, they have been fed regularly on the top of the Rock by the British Army. Numbers have fluctuated – in 1900 there were 130, in 1943 only four, which on Mr Churchill's instructions were increased by imports to 24. Today they are kept at between 30 and 40, and controlled by exports to zoos and culling, which the author, who is studying their adaptation to living with man, considers unacceptably wasteful.

The Barbary macaques, Barbary apes or rock apes, on Gibraltar are the oldest established free-ranging monkey population in Europe. They present a unique example of man-animal involvement over the past 240 years, and they could be an important nucleus for the conservation of the species.

Early records

Whether *Macaca sylvanus* occurred on Gibraltar during the Pleistocene, as it did in other parts of Europe,⁸ is not yet known. No entire skulls or skeletons have ever been excavated. Imrie found some fossil bones in 1798 which have been classified as belonging to a monkey.⁶ Busk in the last century stated that the monkey did not exist in the fossil state,³ but Trouessart later listed *M. fossilis* based on Imrie's report.¹³ Hinton accepted Busk's opinion.⁵

As the species, or its immediate ancestor, occurred during the Pleistocene in Spain as well as other parts of Europe, the basic stock on the Rock, if it did occur, could have been a relict population. There is no evidence to support the idea of a continuing European population within historic times, but there is ample proof of imports from North Africa.

Given that Islam and the earlier Mediterranean civilisations knew of the Barbary macaques⁹ it is possible that introductions into Gibraltar could have taken place then. The apes are not mentioned in the natural history accounts for the area in the Phoenician, Roman and Moorish eras, nor in accounts of the Spanish period, 1492-1704. Despite some authors' insistence that monkeys were on the Rock before the British took over, the earliest accounts, some anecdotal,¹ date back only to the start of the British occupation in 1740. Consequently, the note that appeared in the Governor's books of that year mentioning a large introduction of apes and 'other game from Barbary' is of substantial importance. Nine years later, a request by three garrison officers to shoot such game for sport was granted. Whatever the truth, the dramatic increase in the monkeys' numbers during the 1800s presents a case of a nascent population of animals, easily attributed to a start in the 18th century.

1800-1918

The Gibraltar Directory of 1898 recorded 12 apes on the Rock in 1864. In June 1875, a complaint was officially recorded that up to 60 apes were stealing fruit off the trees, tearing stones from the walls, and breaking down wooden railings and roof gutters at a naval officer's house. In March 1880, the Admiralty objected to the population being destroyed but asked for a watchman to be employed to drive them from residential areas, and the Governor issued a warrant to shoot a fixed number – three animals 'to commence with'. At the end of 1893, Mr P.L. Sclater read a communication from the Governor to the Zoological Society of London confirming a further increase in the Gibraltar macaque population, and a further report dated November 1900 assured the Society that there were 130 on the Rock.¹²

The monkeys once more took to raiding the town in search of food. People who fed them were partly to blame, but probably natural food on the Upper Rock was not sufficient to sustain such a large population, and the temptation to raid the 40 acres of land under cultivation (15 as gardens, the rest mainly vines and fruit trees)⁷ too great to resist. In 1913, as a desperate attempt to keep the animals outside the town area, a soldier was instructed to feed the monkeys up the Rock, but this had little success, possibly owing to the inadequacy of the feeding allowance and the Army's inexperience in animal management. Within four months a complaint is recorded of 36 animals taking over part of the town.

1918-1946

The police were instructed to prevent street hawkers from selling fruit for feeding the monkeys. Complaints persisted and it was proposed to reduce the population, eight of which were old and six vicious, to 12. An increase in the feeding allowance and the enactment of an Ordinance in December 1918 which prohibited 'encouraging Rock Apes to come down from the Upper Rock or feeding them at any place other than' the Queen's Gate area, did not stop the disturbances. The provisioning at Queen's Gate continued; each ape received a name and a roll was called at each session. Between 1920 and 1939 numbers fluctuated and some were imported in the 1930s¹⁵ Some older animals were sent to zoos in Bristol and London; two were sent to Dehiwela Zoo in Ceylon in the late 1940s.

Since the 1920s the Army authorities have kept some records. In the early

Barbary macaque exports from Gibraltar 1949-1979.

Year	MM	FF	MM	FF	Total Exported
1949	2	0	0	0	2
1950	1	0	0	0	1
1951	1	0	1	0	2
1952	1	1	1	0	3
1953	1	0	1	0	2
1954	1	3	4	0	8
1955	3	2	2	3	10
1956	1	0	0	0	1
1957	1	1	2	0	4
1958	1	1	2	1	5
1959	2	2	5	4	13
1961	0	0	0	1	1
1962	1	0	0	0	1
1963	1	0	0	0	1
1964	0	1	0	1	2
1965	0	0	1	1	2
1966	0	0	1	1	2
1967	0	0	1	1	2
1972	0	0	3	1	4
1974	0	0	1	1	2
1975	0	0	1	3	4
1979	0	2	3	0	5
TOTAL	17	13	29	18	77

1940s births and deaths were consistently recorded by Captain J. Fitzgerald, who also prepared a memorandum on their care and maintenance and supplied some ecological data and pedigrees. During the war, when numbers were down to four, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, gave instructions to bring numbers up to 24, and animals were imported in 1943, 1944 and 1945. After the hard winter of 1946, causing deaths from pneumonia, numbers stood at 16, and provisioning was resumed. The new population was split into the two troops which exist today, at Middle Hill and Queen's Gate.

1946-1979

From the nine animals in each troop in 1946 (only one female which was from the original pre-1940 stock) numbers now fluctuate between 30 and 40 and are kept in check by the Army.² Being fed on the Upper Rock, where they can roam freely, and prevented from making sallies outside, has improved man-monkey relations. Also, selection against a total wild state by culling those animals which present a physical threat (jumping on people, or biting¹⁰), or are a greater nuisance (attracted to hats, jewelry, etc.) or inclined to wander into houses, has reduced their daily movements and resulted in a more tractable group of animals.

Conservation and the Future

The Queen's Gate troop is an important tourist attraction. Over 1000 people may visit them in a day, some of whom tease them, feed them with sweets and even maltreat them. The staff, an ape-keeper and an assistant, act as guides, maintain the feeding areas, get the food and feed the animals, guard against offenders, and control the animals in addition to their normal duties as

soldiers. If a full-time non-military person, trained in conservation, were appointed, proper wardening would be possible, close observation could be kept and information could be provided for the tourist.

The extent to which human influence and manipulation are changing the character of the Barbary macaque on the Rock is important since a balance is desirable between conserving the species and keeping it in a natural state.

The value of Gibraltar as a study centre for primatologists has been little advertised and is worth asserting. Except for the efforts of Dr F.P. Burton of Toronto University and Dr A. Whiten of St Andrews, who have sent students to the Rock for a number of years, and my own two-year study of the Rock apes' ecology and social structure, the Gibraltar macaques have had no formal scientific recognition, although Gibraltar offers potential for long-term studies on a population learning and adapting to live with man.

With births exceeding deaths every year, culling is essential. Since 1949, 76 monkeys (31 per cent of those born) have had to be sent to zoos and wildlife parks and another 10 have been killed. However, the Rock as a supplier of the species may be decreasing in importance in view of the breeding success of two parks in France, the Montagne des Singes and the Parc de Rocamadour – in 1974 they held 418 – and surplus monkeys will probably have to be destroyed in future. Such cannot be justified.

References

1. ANON. 1825. Anecdotes of Monkeys. John Murray, London.
2. BURTON, F.D. and L. SAWCHUK 1974. Demography of *Macaca sylvanus* of Gibraltar. *Primates* 15, 271-278.
3. BUSK, G. 1879. On the ancient or Quaternary fauna of Gibraltar, as exemplified in the mammalian remains of the ossiferous breccia. *Trans. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 10, 53-146.
4. DEAG, J.M. 1978. The status of the Barbary macaque *Macaca sylvanus* in captivity and factors influencing its distribution in the wild. In: Primate Conservation, C.H. Bourne and Prince Rainier (eds.). Academic Press, New York.
5. HINTON, M.A.C. 1908. *Geol. Mag. N.S.* 5, 440-444.
6. IMRIE, N. 1798. A short mineralogical description of the mountain of Gibraltar, reviewed by Rev. J. Walker. *Trans. Roy. Soc. Edinb.* 4, 191-202.
7. KELAART, E.F. 1846. Flora Calpensis. John van Voorst, London.
8. KURTEN, B. 1968. Pleistocene Mammals of Europe. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
9. OSMAN-HILL, W.C. 1974. Comparative Anatomy and Taxonomy, VII: Cynopithecinae; *Cercocebus*, *Macaca*, *Cynopithecus*. Wiley, New York.
10. RUSSELL, C. 1952. The apes of Gibraltar, *Oryx* 1, 22-24.
11. SCLATER, P.L. 1893. Mr P.L. Sclater on the Gibraltar monkeys. *Trans. Zool. Soc. Lond.*, April 18th, 325.
12. SCLATER, P.L. 1900. Mr Sclater on *Macaca inuus*. *Trans. Zool. Soc. London.* November 20th, 773-774.
13. TAUB, D.M. 1977. Geographic distribution and habitat diversity of the Barbary macaque, *Macaca sylvanus*, L. *Folia Primatol.* 27, 108-133.
14. TAUB, D.M. 1978. The Barbary macaque. *Oryx* 14.
15. TROUËSSART, E.L. 1897-1905. *Catalogus mammalium tam viventium quam fossilium*. R. Friedlander & Sohn, Berlin.
15. ZEUNER, F.E. 1952. Monkeys in Europe, past and present. *Oryx* 1, 265-273.

John Emmanuel Fa, Animal Ecology Research Group, Dept. of Zoology, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PS.