

Project Update: December 2020

Part I: The Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*

We began the project by studying the Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra* in the Middle Oum Er Rbia River. Results of the interviews and surveys confirmed the presence of this mammal in two sites in the study region. We have found that there is a conflict between local people, especially fishermen, and otters due to the competition for fish. Otters are facing extreme threats by human-induced habitat destruction, disturbance by local people, pollution, low water quality and vegetation burning. Results will be published in *IUCN Otter Specialist Group Bulletin* Volume 37 Issue 2.



The camera trap, used to studying otters, installed and ready to capture the activity of any passing animal. On the right, one of the photographs taken at night by this camera showing the river and one location where there are recent footprints of otters. © Abderrazak El Alami.

Conservation activities:

We have held discussions with local people living or working near the Middle Oum Er Rbia River on the ecological roles of otters and the benefit from their presence in the river. We have explained in particular how this otter regulates the populations of many species of fish, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and rodents.

We have held discussions with students living in the region of Souk Sebt about ecological roles of carnivore species (otters, jackals, red fox) and the importance of the conservation of biodiversity.



Dr El Alami with student of Khawarezmi High School, Souk Sebt, Morocco. © Abderrazak El Alami.

Part II: terrestrial carnivores (ongoing project)

We are currently working on the status, distribution of the carnivore species in the central High Atlas Mountains and the local people-carnivore conflict.

Methods: collection of data by interviews with local people and conduct of surveys to gather information about the carnivore species.

Objectives:

- Status and distribution of the carnivore species in the central High Atlas.
- Evaluation of human-carnivore conflict.
- Study of the predatory behavior of domestic animals by wild carnivores.
- Determine which species are most likely (high risk) and least likely (low risk) to cause damage.
- Find practical solutions to reduce predation of domestic animals by wild carnivores.
- Establish an action plan to conserve the wild carnivores.

Preliminary results: Results of the surveys confirmed the presence of seven carnivore species in the central High Atlas Mountains. Interview results showed that the majority of the carnivore species are viewed unfavorably in the study region. We have found that there is a conflict between local people and carnivores due to the predation of domestic animals.

Surprising result: domestic carnivores, especially domestic dogs *Canis lupus familiaris*, cause similar or sometimes more damage on domestic animals than those caused by wild carnivores.

Publication: after finishing the data collection, the results will be published in an open access journal.

Activities: we will carry out an awareness session for the local people and contact the authorities responsible for fauna and flora in this region to propose an action plan to conserve wild carnivores.



Left: A sheep killed by a jackal in the Azilal region, Morocco. © Abderrazak El Alami. Right: A jackal killed by the inhabitants in the Azilal region, Morocco. © Abderrazak El Alami.