

# 1 Online trade of Barbary macaques *Macaca sylvanus* in Algeria 2 and Morocco

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15 With the rise in popularity and accessibility of the internet, a growing number of people are  
16 selling goods online. Classified advertisement websites such as eBay, Gumtree and Craigslist  
17 allow users to sell goods or services directly to consumers, bypassing the need for an  
18 intermediary. The convenience, anonymity and widespread reach of these websites has led  
19 to an increase in legal and illegal wildlife being traded online (IFAW 2014; Lavorgna 2014,  
20 2015). Sellers advertise illegal wildlife openly as there is little need to resort to darkweb sites  
21 (Harrison et al. 2016). Recent reports indicate that the trade of prohibited animals online is  
22 flourishing, and is a cause of conservation concern for a broad range of species (IFAW 2014;  
23 Hinsley et al. 2016; Morgan and Chng 2017).

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25 The Barbary macaque (*Macaca sylvanus*) is considered Endangered by the International Union  
26 for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and was upgraded to the Convention on International Trade

in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix I in January 2017, with offtake for the illegal pet trade noted as one of the significant factors contributing to their decline in the wild (Anon 2016). Once present throughout North Africa, the range of this species is now limited to Algeria, Morocco, and a small, introduced population in Gibraltar (Taub 1984). Legislation in both Morocco and Algeria prohibits the trade in Barbary macaques, with potential fines of up to USD10,000 per animal in Morocco and USD1,000 in Algeria. There is evidence that the species has been traded since at least the early Iron Age (Massetti and Bruner 2009) and previous studies have noted the presence of a domestic trade in Barbary macaques in Morocco (van Lavieren 2008; Nijman et al. 2015; Waters et al. 2016) and Algeria (Sabrina 2008) but no assessment of the online trade has been conducted in either country.

We investigated popular Moroccan and Algerian classified advertisement websites for a six month period, from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017 to 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2017, searching for trade in Barbary macaques. We searched eight websites in Morocco and four in Algeria using search terms in English, French and Arabic (i.e. monkey, macaque, singe, magot, فرد) and browsed their ‘pet’ and/or ‘miscellaneous’ sections. We collected information on the, age, price and description of the macaques, as well as locations and other goods offered by the seller. The number of views received by each advertisement was used as a metric for a post’s popularity.

As is the case with any online advertisements, there is no certainty that the seller is actually in possession of the product at the time of advertising; there is a chance that it is a scam. However, the presence of photos in most cases – different for each advertisement and not found on an online reverse image search – indicates a likelihood that the sellers were in possession of the monkeys. It is therefore assumed that they are selling the individuals advertised. They may also be using the advertisement as a ‘pre-order’ after which they then source the monkeys.

Eight Barbary macaques were found for sale as pets on two websites (see Table 1). One macaque was on Marocannonces.com, a website aimed at Moroccan customers and seven were on the Algerian website Ouedkniss.com. All macaques were being sold by different sellers. Other goods advertised by these sellers ranged from dogs to property but in only one case included another prohibited animal (a grey parrot *Psittacus erithacus*). The macaques were aged between 3 months old and 4 years old and cost between USD450 and USD600, where prices were given.

**Table 1.** Table showing each of the advertisements observed between 01<sup>st</sup> January 2017 and 01<sup>st</sup> July 2017, the website on which it was observed, the date it was uploaded, the city in which the seller resides, the price, the age of the macaque and other goods on the seller's profile.

Website	Date	City	Price USD	Age	Other goods sold
Ouedkniss	07/01/17	Constantine	600		Not available
Ouedkniss	06/02/17	Algiers	None given	3 months	Farm animals, engines
Ouedkniss	18/04/17	Tizi Ouzou	450	2 years	Property, cars, dogs
Ouedkniss	07/06/17	Oran	460	4 years	Bike parts, tents
Ouedkniss	28/06/17	Msila	None given	9 months	Computers
Ouedkniss	30/06/17	Oran	550	3.5 years	None
Ouedkniss	01/07/17	Alger	None given	9 months	African grey parrot
Marocannonces	28/06/17	Mohammedia	470	3 months	Not available

The view counter for advertisements on Marocannonces was deemed inaccurate as it appeared not to register multiple visits from different computers by the researchers conducting this study. On Ouedkniss, the total views for six advertisements was 7787 over a combined 359 days, though this is not likely to represent individual people as customers will visit multiple advertisements and revisit advertisements at different times. Pages on Ouedkniss gained an average of 10.8 views per day, with no apparent decrease over time. The least popular post observed in the time period did not include any photos, possibly contributing to its lack of success. Five advertisements were removed over the course of the

study. We believe that this action was taken by the sellers as we reported each advertisement as illegal to the site administrator but no action was taken on the remaining three, one of which was active for 145 days.

Despite the greater number of classified advertisement websites in Morocco, we found more macaques on the Algerian website Ouedkniss. This corresponds with data collected by the NGO Barbary Macaque Awareness & Conservation (BMAC) from before 2017 that macaque trade is not as popular online in Morocco as it is in markets. Only two reports were received by BMAC of Barbary macaques for sale online in Morocco between 2015-2016 which is in contrast to their consistent presence in market squares, where younger macaques are sold clandestinely to both national and international tourists outside the area of photo tout activity (Waters, S. pers obs). This openness may mean that macaque vendors do not need to sell online. Fewer large open markets, or more sustained efforts from the Algerian government to combat open trade may also have driven the trade online.

The evident sustained interest in buying and selling Barbary macaques – an Endangered, nationally protected species – online in Algeria is a cause for conservation concern. These advertisements are on the website for many months, indicating a lack of awareness by the authorities and insufficient action to remove the posts by site administrators. We recommend that both the site administrators and the Algerian government address the illegal selling of Barbary macaques online by quickly removing illegally advertised animals from the website and prosecuting those selling them.

Because we have not included searches on TOR-based forums or social media, this pilot study does not necessarily provide a comprehensive account of the online trade of Barbary macaque, but provides a minimum number and highlights an unregulated market. We urge

conservationists and government officials to be alert to the shifting trends in wildlife trade and monitor online trade as closely as market trade.

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