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Notes on the Fauna of North Western Spain.

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With plate 12 and 1 text figure.

The following notes are based upon observations made in the summer 1892 whilst travelling with my wife in the north western provinces of Spain. The Vierzo district, and above all the western portion of the Cantabrian chain of mountains are a terra incognita to the naturalist.

The Vierzo is, roughly speaking, the western corner of the province of Leon. The Cantabrian mountains divide it towards the North from the province of Oviedo, towards the West from that of Lugo in Galicia. The only high road, which connects Leon with Galicia leads across the Pass of Piedrafita, to the North of which lies the Sierra de Picos, to the South the Sierra de Caurel. This road was the great highway to Santiago de Compostella, and was crowded in the middle ages, „when times were better“, by the thousands of French and German pilgrims, who were anxious to gain the Scallop shell. From these pilgrims Villafranca has received its name, one of the few towns of the Vierzo, close to the site of the old Bergidum (hence Vierzo) of the Romans.

We made our headquarters at the wretched village of Burbia, 2700 feet above the sealevel, on the south eastern slopes of the Sierra de Picos. This Sierra is subalpine in character, some of its peaks rising to a height of 6500 feet. As regards scenery, fauna and flora, this district is a paradise, but exactly the reverse wherever natives and accommodation are concerned.

There is a collection of local objects of natural history at Ponferrada, in the Museo del Instituto. Many of the animals are wrongly named, but they are in a decent state of preservation. The apothecary fills the professorial chair of natural history. The zoological collection at Lugo, although in a large, airy room of the fine Government building, is miserable, the few specimens being in an abominable condition.

The University collection at Santiago is extremely well kept, and, what is rarer still, the specimens are correctly named. Unfortunately the authorities are reluctant to pay much attention to the local fauna, which could be well represented at little cost; they prefer to spend a great deal of the little money available on sensational specimens, as for instance a tiger.

Local vernacular names should always be ascertained by travelling naturalists, as they are of importance not only from a zoological, but equally so from a linguistic and historical point of view. I have found their study most interesting. The aboriginal Basques and Kelts, the Romans, Goths and Arabs have all contributed to the vernacular nomenclature of the Spanish fauna.

Ursus arctos. Bear. „Oso“ and „Osa“.

Bears still occur not unfrequently all along the Cantabrian range of mountains. On the central chain of Spanish mountains they seem to be rarer. There are none now in Portugal. Formerly, as lately as the 16th century, before the devastation of the forests, the bear seems to have had a much wider distribution in the Peninsula. The armorial bearings of the town of Madrid show a tree and a bear and the surrounding woods were known as the haunts of this animal, Madrid has a good right to its armorial bearings, while the bear of Berlin owes its existence in great measure to an etymological mistake.

The School Museum of Ponferrada possesses a large stuffed bear, which was killed in the very outskirts of the town in March 1878. Some people who were working in the fields, came across the animal, which they gallantly but imprudently attacked with their hatchets. The bear retired into a small farm, and when she saw herself still pursued, entered into the combat, embraced and killed one man, and wounded another badly on the hand. There upon the labourers procured help from the town and a large number of people congregated around the farm, which in the meantime the bear, however, had left.

She was soon discovered and ultimately shot only a few hundred yards from the town.

The Alcalde of Burbia killed a large she-bear on May 25th 1892; the father with several youngsters were still supposed to be in the neighbourhood during our stay in that wretched village, but various attempts to find them were unsuccessful.

The people at Burbia all agreed that the bears, so far as man is concerned, are absolutely harmless, and, when tracked, will do their best to escape. This they generally manage to do, because some of their sense organs, namely the ear and nose, but not the eye, are very sharp. When surprised in his lair, or driven into a defile, or above all, if wounded or worried by dogs, the bear's temper is up at once and the tables are likely to be turned against the hunter. However I did not hear of any man in the Sierra de Picos, who had lost his life in a bearhunt. The bear being by choice a strict vegetarian, his flesh is eaten and the smoke-cured hams are said to be especially delicious.

Mustela vulgaris. Weasel. „Mustela“.

A stuffed weasel, with a field mouse (*Arvicola arvalis*) in its mouth, is in the Museum at Ponferrada, but unfortunately the group is labelled: „*Sorex araneus* — Muçaraña“ i. e. Shrew.

The weasel is also common in Galicia. „Mustela“ is also the Spanish vernacular name. „Lista como una mustela“ i. e. as sly as a weasel, is a common saying.

Mustela putorius. Polecat. „Furon“.

In the Santiago Museum, from the neighbourhood.

Mustela foina. Marten. „Garduña“.

Santiago Museum, from the neighbourhood, also in the woods, above Burbia.

Viverra genetta. Genet. „Marta“.

Santiago Museum, common in the vineyards of the surrounding country. This little animal seems to be well known in most parts of Spain and Portugal; it is called „Geneta“ except in Galicia.

Herpestes widdringtoni.

This Ichneumon does not occur in Galicia. The Museum of Santiago possesses several stuffed specimens, but the animal is otherwise

unknown. Very local in its distribution it seems to be least rare in the South of Spain, in the Alemtejo and in the Algarve, in vineyards on flat ground, but also in the Asturias, whence Lord LILFORD has received it. According to him it is called „melon“ or „meloncillo“.

Some naturalists are inclined to think that this animal was introduced into Spain by the Moors, as a destroyer of mice and rats, and its very local, sporadic occurrence seems to favour that view, but there are several objections. First, the Iberian *Herpestes widdringtoni* exhibits some slight, but apparently constant differences in colour from the North African *H. ichneumon*; and even if these differences be not of specific but only of subspecific or racial importance, it would be a rash attempt to explain them as the immediate result of the introduction from Africa into Spain, although it is conceivable that about one thousand years may have produced such changes in a shortlived little mammal, especially if for arguments sake we assume that it was semidomesticated. Secondly, it may be asked, why should the Moors take the trouble of introducing this animal into a country which was already blessed with the domestic cat. Whether the latter was in Iberia before the Romans, or if it was introduced by their legionaries, we do not know, but it is very probable that the Visigoths had domestic cats. The Spanish and Portuguese name of these creatures is „gato“, which of course is the same as cat, Katze; and *catus* is late Latin. Moreover the Spaniards call their cats by exactly the same sound as the Germans, namely by *miez-miez*! These facts show, I think, that in Spain the cat received and has retained its name and call from the Gothic, but not from the Iberian, the Roman, or the Moorish population. Lastly the very name of *Herpestes*, namely „Melon“ is derived from the Latin *meles*, while there is no name of Moorish origin, and considering the way in which the name clings to nearly everything introduced by the Moors into Spain, it is most unlikely that the *Ichneumon* should be an exception.

Concerning the vernacular names of many of the smaller mammals, there exists a good deal of local variation and of uncertainty. For instance *Mustela foina*, is according to Lord LILFORD generally known as „foina“, while *M. putorius* is called „marta“. In Galicia they are called „garduña“ and „furon“ respectively, while „marta“ is the term applied to the „geneta“ of other parts of Spain.

„Marta“ (with *mrt* common to all the Roman and Teutonic languages) is of course the same as the German Marder and the Eng-

lish marten, the murderer, while furon is the thief or rogue. The derivation of garduña is wrapped in obscurity.

Meles taxus. Badger. „Tegon“.

Common in Galicia, also in the Vierzo. The name of this animal goes likewise back the remote antiquity; the Spanish „tejon“ or „tasugo“, Portuguese „teixugo“, Italian tasso, the low latin *taxus* and German Dachsh refer to the same root which in English appears in to dig.

Lutra vulgaris. Otter. „Nutria“.

In the rivers of Galicia and North Portugal. The Portuguese at the Minho, Cavado and Lima call this animal „lontra“. Accidentally the southern limit of the otter seems to coincide with that of the salmon; the latter ascends the Minho and then the Sil into the Vierzo.

Erinaceus europaeus. Hedgehog. „Eriço“.

Galicia and Vierzo. Sometimes called „porco espin“, properly speaking the name of the Porcupine, *Hystrix cristata*, which is said to be of very rare occurrence in Andalusia.

Myogale pyrenaica. Muskrat. „Rato mosquetero“

This interesting little animal seems to be restricted to the Pyrenees, the Cantabrian range and the western continuation of these mountain systems into North Portugal. It has been found in the streams of the Vierzo, e. g. in the Rio Valcarce near Villafranca, where my friend Mr. ALFRED TAIT, a keen sportsman and ardent naturalist at Oporto, procured a specimen. The same gentleman has caught this species in the Serra Gerez in North Portugal. A specimen in the Museum of Ponferrada is labelled *Talpa europaea*, „Topo“!

The name „rato mosquetero“ needs no explanation. In the Pyrenees the animal is called „desman“. Some etymologists will recognise in this word the latin *manus*! Equally futile, however, seems to be the attempt to explain it as Basque, „deseman“ = to give up that what has given itself!

Talpa europaea. Mole. „Topo“.

Molehills are plentiful in the Vierzo and in suitable localities of Galicia, but in the damp mountain meadows and on schistaceous ground they are rare or absent.

Sorex araneus. Shrew. „Muçaraña“ i. e. *Mus araneus*.
Common in Galicia and in the Vierzo.

Canis vulpes. Fox. „Rapozo“ or „Zorro“.

Common everywhere, e. g. Ponferrada, Burbia, Becerrea, Santiago.

While there is no difficulty in deriving the name „rapozo“ from the latin *rapere*, to rob, „zorro“ and „zorra“ (old Spanish „zurra“), has led to a most amusing explanation. There is a verb *zurrar* or *surrar*, which means to cut or to scrape off the hair and is possibly a contracted form of *subradere*. The unfortunate fox is now supposed to have received its name „zorro“ from this verb *surrar* „because the fox is of such a hot nature or composition that at certain times in summer he sheds all his hair“! The reasonable explanation is given in the Basque word „zurra“ which actually means astute or sly.

Canis lupus. Wolf. „Lobo“.

Everywhere in the mountains, although often not seen or heard of for months. In the winter wolves are more frequently met with; when driven by hunger, they make raids into the more inhabited districts. During our stay at Burbia wolves killed a calf on the mountain pastures, and one evening we met a wolf on the barren plateau making his way towards a sheep fold in one of the valleys. Sheep and goats are never left out during the night, but are either driven home into the villages or into pens and folds, which in the Sierra de Picos are generally constructed of stone slabs. The enormous herds on the Serra d'Estrella in Portugal are not so regularly hurdled in, but are protected by men and colossal wolf dogs especially trained.

At Burbia I was told the following story. In the month of January, when the mountains were deeply covered with snow, a man who was out in the woods, saw to his surprise a roedeer rush up to him and seek shelter between his legs. The poor creature was hotly pursued by a wolf. The man, who was a great sportsman, first killed the roe and then he shot the wolf, having thus managed to make meat and to kill a dangerous wild beast *à un golpe* (at one stroke). *Hazer carne* (to make meat), in plain English to butcher, is a common expression among these semi-savages for shooting game. — Wolf stories are plentiful.

Felis catus. Wild cat. „Gato bravo“.

Curiously enough there is no specimen in the Museums of Ponferrada, Lugo and Santiago. I was left in doubt if the wild cat occurs in the Sierra de Picos or in Galicia. The University Museum of Coimbra possesses several very dark Portuguese specimens, which are supposed to be genuine.

Felis pardina. Lynx. „Lince“.

This apparently strictly Iberian species does not seem to occur in north western Spain. I have seen stuffed specimens from the eastern Alemtejo, and a wild one in the Marismas.

Plecotus auritus. Longeared Bat. — ***Rhinolophus ferrum-equinum.*** Horse-shoe Bat. — ***Vespertilio murinus.*** Mouse coloured Bat.

Specimens of these three species of bats are in the Museum of Santiago, from the town. They are also common at Burbia, in hollow trees, in the houses, and show predilection for the vessels and globes of the pendant lamps of the church. The natives entertain the common belief that the bats collect in these vessels in search of the oil.

The Spanish vernacular name for bat is „murciélago“ or „murciégalo“; the natives of Burbia, who speak a sort of Gallego dialect, call it „morcego“, which approaches the Portuguese „murcego“ i. e. *Mus caecus*, blind mouse. An animal with small eyes, which lives in the dark, must needs be blind!

Sciurus vulgaris. Squirrel. „Ardilla“.

Not uncommon in the chestnut and oak trees of the Vierzo and of Galicia, e. g. Villafranca, Burbia, Santiago.

The old Spanish and still local Portuguese name of the squirrel is „arda“ or „harda“; this circumstance excludes the possibility of deriving „ardilla“ from the latin *nitedula* or *nitella*. Not a bad explanation of „arda“ is the Basque *a r i d a* = something that always moves. Another name of this animal in Portugal, Old Castile, Aragon and Catalonia is „esquilo“ and „esquirol“, interesting because of the English name squirrel, whatever may be the true meaning of this word.

Arctomys marmota. „Marmota“.

A stuffed specimen of the marmot is in the Museum of Santiago but without a locality on its label. We never saw or heard a marmot during our wanderings in the Sierra de Picos, nor does this creature seem to be known to the natives.

Lepus cuniculus. Rabbit. „Conejo“.

Absent in the mountainous granitic and schistaceous districts; with predilection in the sandy plains.

Lepus sp. Hare. „Liebra“.

Curiously enough we never saw a hare in north western Spain, either alive or in Museums.

Mus decumanus. Brown Rat. „Rato, rata“.

Very common everywhere, to judge from the many dead bodies in the streets.

Mus rattus. Black Rat. „Rato negro“.

Still found in Santiago and at Burbia, but well known to be getting scarce.

Mus musculus. House-mouse. „Raton“. — ***Mus agrestis.***
Field-mouse.

Common.

Cervus elaphus. Red deer.

„Ciervo“ and „cierva“, occasionally called „venado“ and „viado“ (i. e. the chase) although this expression may, according to Lord LILFORD be applied to Deer in general, including Fallow and Roe, also to venison.

The Red deer I have ascertained to occur in the mountains of Leon, in the Sierra de Sanabria, Serra Gerez, Tras os Montes and in the Minho district. It is however absolutely unknown on the Sierra de Picos, i. e. North and West of the Vierzo; it is likewise absent in the Algarra, although in the Marismas of South Western Spain I have seen it frequently.

[*Cervus dama.* Fallow deer. „Gamo“.

Apparently not in Galicia, certainly not in the Sierra de Picos].

Cervus capreolus. Roe. „Corzo“.

Common in the woods, as Ponferrada, Villafranca, Piedrafita. In the Sierra de Picos the roe ascends to a height of 3500 feet and grazes not unfrequently close to the chamois.

Several untenable and wild suggestions have been made to explain the origin of the word corzo, but the following series of changes is very reasonable: caprea, caurea, corea, corja, corza. A range of mountains, S.-W. of the Sierra de Picos, is actually still called Sierra de Caurel, and is, as I was informed by people at the pass of Piedrafita, famous for its game.

Rupicapra tragus. Chamois. „Rebezo“ and „Gamuza“.

The distribution of the Spanish chamois coincides with the Pyrenees and the whole of the Cantabrian or Asturian range. The north western limit is that of the higher and wilder parts of the Sierra de Picos, excluding the neighbourhood of Piedrafita and Becerreá. There are no chamois to the South of the Cantabrian range.

Above Burbia, in the Sierra de Picos, the chamois seems to be plentiful all the year round. We were told of a herd of „more than a hundred“, probably less, which had been seen on one or two occasions in the early summer of last year. Small troops of five to eight could easily be observed during our stay in those parts; these troops are always composed of females and young, while the males lead a solitary life and are very shy and wary. The chamois spends the night upon the ragged peaks, comes down in the morning to feed, and descends into the bushy slopes in order to rest in the shade during the heat of the day. We have seen them descend to the level of not more than 3500 feet.

The Spanish chamois, of which I was fortunate enough to procure several specimens, differs in several points from the typical race of Switzerland, Bavaria and the Tyrol. It is of a considerably more slender build, the neck especially appearing longer and more graceful in proportion. The general colour, in summer, is of a lighter and more reddish brown, although such intensely coloured specimens are also met with in the Austrian Tyrol. Lastly the Spanish chamois lacks the black stripe which in the Central European race extends from the neck along the spine to the root of the tail.

The chamois is supposed to have a close time and, belonging to the „caza mayor“, is not to be killed without a game license, but in the Sierra de Picos, whoever has a gun, helps himself, and whenever

one of the numerous feast days approaches, parties of two or three men sally forth „to make meat“.

The natives of the Sierra de Picos call the chamois „rebezo“, sometimes pronounced ribisso. According to Lord LILFORD, rebezo or rebezo is the name also in the rest of the Cantabrian range, while in Aragon it is called sario and in Catalonia „gamuza“; in the Pyrenees it is called „izard.“ „Gamuza“ is also used in Villafraanca del Vierzo; probably in many places outside Catalonia.

These various names of the same, but conspicuous, animal are very interesting from an ethnological point of view. — Rebezo is supposed to be derived from the Latin *reversus*, with reference to the sharp backward curve of the horns. — The proper derivations of izard and of gamuza are beset with difficulties.

LITTRÉ gives under isard the Catalanian isart and sicart, the Provençal uzarn, suggesting that the last may be derived from the German isern, eisern, i. e. iron or bluish-grey; this would suit the winter colour of the Spanish chamois very well. Others connect isard with the Germanic hissant, to hiss or to whistle, izar in Spanish, and this would do equally well with reference to the loud warning note of the animal. Its Basque name is basantza i. e. forest-goat. Another name, probably like the Aragonese a variation of uzarn, occurs in the following quotation ¹⁾: „Il y a [dans les Pyrénées] deux sortes de boucs, les uns s'appellent boucs sauvages et les autres ysarnes [chamois].“

Gamuza is of course the German Gams and Gemse, and the French chamois; possibly to be derived from the Celtic cam = crooked, which would suit the shape of the horns and would, moreover, express the same idea as rebezo.

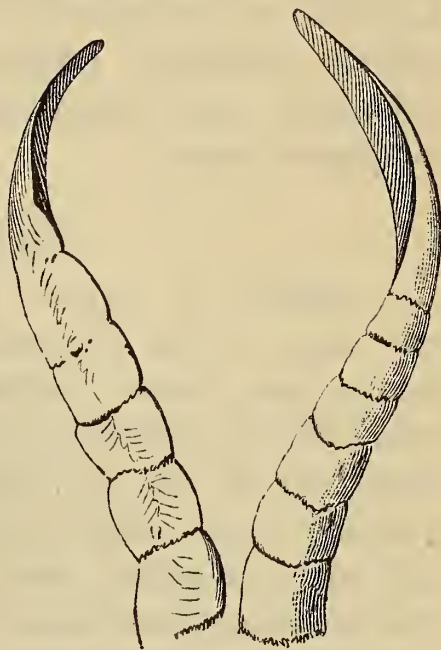
Capra pyrenaica. Spanish Goat. „Cabra montez“.

„Bucardo“ in Aragon, according to Lord LILFORD. This animal does not occur in the Cantabrian range; certainly not in the Sierra de Picos, nor near the Peñas de Europa. All the more interesting is its regular occurrence in the Serra de Gerez, in the northern corner of Portugal. Formerly more common, the species is now, in the Serra de Gerez, reduced to a small herd of perhaps

1) Gaston Phoebus, *Vénerie de Dufouilloux*, p. 65, according to SCHINZ, *Bemerkungen über die Arten der wilden Ziegen*, in: *Neue Denkschrift. Allg. Schweizer. Gesellsch.*, Bd. 2, 1838, 3 plates.

only half a dozen. One specimen was shot there a few years ago by the King; a young one was caught alive in 1891, a photograph of which I owe to the kindness of my friend Mr. A. TAIT of Oporto. In the summer of 1885 I made an unsuccessful attempt to stalk these „cabras bravas“, as they are called by the Portuguese.

This goat was first recorded from the Gerez by Prof. BARBOZA DU BOCAGE. It certainly does not occur now in the Serra d'Estrella, or on the Serra de Monchique in the Algarve. Its present distribution in Spain is still wide, extending over the whole of the Pyrenees, the whole range of the mountains from the Sierra Nevada to the Sierra de Ronda, the Sierra de Gredos, Sierra de Avila and parts of the Sierra Morena. Lord LILFORD at least is in possession of a very fine specimen from the range last-named. From information received at the Sierra de Picos, I think that this goat occurs also on the Sierra da Peña negra, to the S.-W. of Leon. In former times it must have been much more common and more universally distributed over the higher mountain ranges of the Peninsula, for otherwise its now very sporadic occurrence would be difficult to explain.



Capra pyrenaica. Adult ♂.
From Sierra Nevada.

This wild goat was first described by SCHINZ in 1838 as different from the *Ibex* of central Europe, and his figure of the young (on tab. 3 of his work) is very much like the photograph reproduced on plate 12. It is wrong to apply the name of *Ibex* to this very distinct and isolated species, which is essentially a goat, if the shape, bend and formation of the horns be of any taxonomic importance. The wild goats from the Sierra Nevada do not differ from the northern specimens, unless the former ones have somewhat longer and more upright horns, but these are subject to much individual variation and according to age change considerably in curvature, direction, diameter and surface moulding.

Of all the wild goats *Capra pyrenaica*, resembles most *C. pallasii* from the Eastern Caucasus, except that in the latter the transverse section of the horns is triangular with rounded off corners (hence the name *C. cylindricornis* given by some authors)

while in *C. pyrenaica* the section is pearshaped, with a sharp inward projection.

The following are true *Ibices*, with long horns which are curved back in one plane, and have thick transverse ridges in front: *C. ibex*, Savoy, Switzerland; *C. sibirica*; *C. sinaitica*; *C. walie*, Abyssinia; *C. aegagrus* (incl. *C. dorcas*) from Jura, Crete, Cyclades, Asia minor; hereto belongs also *C. caucasica* from the western Caucasus, and the animal from the Elbruz. On the other hand: *C. pyrenaica*, Iberian Peninsula; *C. pallasii*, eastern Caucasus; *C. falconeri* s. *megaceros*, Kashmir, are goats, with doubly curved or with lyre-shaped horns, but without prominent transverse anterior ridges; while *C. jemlanica*, Himalaya, and *C. hylocrius*, southern India, are Goats with small, indifferent horns.

Sus scrofa. Wild boar.

„Jabali“ or „javali“ from the Arabic djabal, mountain. The wild boar of the Peninsula is a common animal of the hilly and mountainous forests, although it occurs also in the plains, for instance in the pine forest of the Marismas. The term jabali is used exclusively for the wild boar, never for the domesticated pig, which is called cerdo (the bristly one). Porco or puerco is not a word used to ears polite, hence the willing retention of the Arabic name. The Spaniards have coined the verb cerdear, like to rear i. e. pig- or bull-fighting; the weapon used is the javalina, a spear, the proper pigsticking implement.



Reprod. J. B. Obernetter, München.

Capra pyrenaica. Half adult.

Verlag von Gustav Fischer, Jena.

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