



Yonuk Shepherd Dog with sheep and a few goats in Denizli

Dwindling Flocks and Vanishing Çoban Köpeği

By Guvener Isik

Turkey, five times larger than Greece, has only 5 million goats compared to Greece's 4 million goats. The main reason behind the low numbers and continuously decreasing population of goats is their conventional negative evaluation and perception by the forest administrations, governments and eventually people. The belief is that goats eat everything and are detrimental to the forests.

Anyone observing goats in a mixed forest composed of soft and hard wood would tell you that goats do not prefer soft wood trees to eat if they have a choice. Pine is the last choice of any goat breed. The Government in Turkey owns pine forests. Pines provide raw material for burning wood, sawmills and the paper industry. The Government owned and created forests of Turkey are primarily compiled of red pines in the Mediterranean regions, which goat would only eat either when the pine trees are very young provided the native vegetation is shaved by forestry, or when they have nothing else to eat.

Maquis are shrubland in the Mediterranean that is composed of over 20 densely growing shrubs including sage, juniper, rosemary, thyme, oregano, wild olive, and bushy oak trees that do not grow over 12 feet high. Maquis are not considered forests by the official voice, although they cover the ground better than tall trees and conserve more water. When the native vegetation like



Goat shepherd Kara and his son in Denizli



Goats set off for grazing and browsing in Denizli



Angora goats, KKK, and sheep grazing in a Bolu mountain near Seben. Most of them are interested in the dry grass instead of the bushes.



Planted Red Pines are surrounding the mountain that is originally a goat browsing and grazing area. The commercial planting will make it impossible for goats to pass through the pines to the pastures. Pines will also cover the flatlands as well as the hills in the near future.

maquis forests are cleared by the forestry and planted and replaced with year old pines, the main diet of goats, the deciduous perennials that could adequately support goats, disappear. One of the reasons for this systematic destruction of the maquis by the forestry is to make available space for the pine trees. This tailored and forced perception via the artificial change of the native fauna leave goats no choice but to eat young pine trees, although goats pose no threat to mature trees whatsoever.

When goats are banned from the artificial pine forests of government, goat shepherds have no choice but to sell their goats and move to the cities. Not only the goat and sheep shepherds but also villages in or near the forests are expected to relocate to the city in the near future. This threatens over 10 million villagers.

Sheep are not totally safe from the abuse of the forest regulations, since they can also mildly damage the young pines like goats. Both goats and sheep eat the new growth of pine trees in the spring when the shoots are soft and easy to digest. They lose their interest in the pines during the other seasons, because old needles have no nutritional value.

The commercial pine plantations which are protected by law in fact destroyed the native oak forests of Anatolia since red pine, *Pinus Brutia*, is an invasive tree which does not allow most native plants to grow underneath. Fire resistant oak forests



Sheep in the dry pasture. Goats are in the rocky mountains not to be seen, but will come back before it gets dark.



A KKK (Anatolian Black Goat) with a İrese sheep in a highland in Antalya .



A typical goat and sheep shelter in the Antalya (South West Anatolia) highlands .



A young KKK Kara Kıl Kecisi is resting in Antalya.

were a good source of fodder for the native Black Hair Goats of Anatolia as well as to deer, wild boars, and insects and birds.

Shepherds who own less than fifty goats or sheep do not keep a shepherd dog, which leads to an accelerated decimation of the dogs. Shepherds of both sheep and goats are not allowed to enter national parks anymore and this has caused mass sales of flocks in the highlands, since highland pastures are a must for almost all the flocks of Anatolia when the lowland vegetation is dead beginning in April in the lowland areas.

In 2007 in some regions of Turkey like Bolu, mixed flocks of both sheep and goats are allowed in the mature forest because of the drought, but this temporary allowance will not save the flocks. The sheep flocks I have seen in northern Anatolia, such as the Bolu highlands have begun carrying only one dog in September of this year, because of the decreasing number of their flock sizes. The same is true in the southern part of Turkey, the Antalya highlands. I encountered flocks without dogs, which is not normal. If we take one dog for one hundred goats as a standard and by taking into account the fact that 10 million goats have been eradicated in Turkey in the last 30 years, I can safely claim that 10 thousand shepherd dogs were lost in the last



Two young ASDs playing and catching up with their goat flock. This flock has fawn, black and white dogs.



A wild boar killed by the same dogs and the head is eaten.



Goats are resting under a tree with two shepherd dogs in Antalya. Can you spot the dogs?

thirty years. This also roughly translates that about 5-10 thousand wolves lost their prey base and died out in Turkey.

The political reason behind eliminating the traditional pastoral life in Turkey is to decrease the number of village populations as the European Community, EC, and World Trade Organization, WTO, requested this.

Goats and sheep evolved with the local fauna of Anatolia and they are only detrimental to the vegetation when their numbers exceed the carrying capacity of the land, which the opposite is the case for Turkey. Turkey consumes less meat from EC countries and imports beef; lamb and goat meat consumption is discouraged by the government through arranged medical voices. Shepherds currently are forced to sell their sheep and goats and either move to the cities or become milk cow farmers that benefit large milk processors.

The maquis forests especially need goats since maquis evolved with goats too. Destroying maquis land destroyed wild life in the Mediterranean climate zones of Anatolia. Migratory birds, wild boar, deer, hyenas, and karakul were negatively affected from the planned destruction of the maquis land along with goats and local culture and along with shepherd dogs.



Anatolian Black Goats (Kara Kıl Kedis) are grazing in the rocky pasture looking for edible grass.



Horizontal Maquis and vertical Arçik trees in the traditional goat browsing area anywhere in the Mediterranean Anatolia.



Arçik trees surrounding Red Pines. As the invasive Red Pines stretch their territory Arçik land will disappear and after the goats. Goats may be allowed to clear the understorey once the red pines are over 8 feet tall which is about 20 years. Neither goats nor shepherd dogs nor shepherds have ability to halt their live styles for this period of time.



A white ASD with Angora goats and sheep in Bolu.

ASDs cannot be preserved in the kennels with pedigree keeping, health certificate collections and dog shows. Once goats and sheep are brought back to where they belong, ASDs will prosper. Until then invasive, easily combustible, pine tree planting with bad water retention abilities like the red pines should be stopped; goats urgently must be declared not dangerous to the grown forests as long as the stock density permits and then reintroduced.

Shepherds love their goats and do not want to be milk cow employees of the milk processors. Goats have become escape goats and ASDs need them to exist. We have no idea about the qualities of the lost subtypes of goats, sheep and dogs that were lost in the last 30 years. The frustrating inevitable fact is their exponential evaporation.