



## CARACAL

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**CARACAL** (*Felis caracal* Schreber = *Lynx caracal*, *Caracal caracal*; [Figure 1](#)), also called “desert lynx” or “Persian lynx”; in Persian, *sīāhgūš*, lit. “black-eared,” so called because the back of its long, tufted, black-tipped ears is distinctively black (the name *caracal* itself comes—ultimately—from Turkish *qara-qūlāq/kara-kūlāk*, lit. “black-ear(ed),” as a calque of the Persian name).

The caracal, which ranges from Africa to central and southwestern Asia, occurs widely in Persia: It has been reported from Kūzestān, Fārs, Kermān, the Kavīr region, Baluchistan, Khorasan, Šāhrud, and Tehran area (for details, see E'temād, II, p. 172, and the distribution map, *ibid.*; see also Harrington, Jr., et al., p. 56, and color pl. 19).

The caracal was renowned for its high coursing speed and for its agility in hunting. Zakariyā Qazvīnī describes it as follows (p. 263, s.v. *ʿanāq* [*al-arzĀμ*], its common name in Arabic): “It is larger than the dog, very good-looking; its color is like that of the red [probably meaning tawny or reddish brown] camel; its ears are black. It hunts as the cheetah does. When walking, it conceals its tracks [i.e., it is digitigrade]. It [stalks and] hunts the crane, and if the crane flies off, it springs up forcefully into the air and catches the crane with its paw” (cf. Balfour, II, p. 752: “It often catches crows as they rise from the ground, by springing 5 to 6 feet into the air after them”). It can be tamed, especially if caught young.

The caracal’s tractability plus its innate hunting prowess have caused it to be trained since ancient times for hunting, just like its congener the *yūz* (cheetah,



q.v.). According to Iranian legendary history (as related by Ferdowsī in the *Šāh-nāma*), Tahmūraṭ was the first to tame and train the caracal and the cheetah, which he selected from among all the wild beasts, and the *bāz* and the shaheen from among the birds of prey (*Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, I, p. 36, vv. 11-14; see also Ebn al-Balkī, p. 28). However, the stronger, faster, and larger cheetah (measuring about 130 cm, excluding its long tail) was much preferred by hunters to the caracal with its inferior strength and size (65-75 cm long, without the tail, and standing about 40-50 cm at the shoulders). The caracal was trained, therefore, to catch relatively small game, such as hares, rabbits, and young gazelles. ‘Alī Nasavī, an expert in training birds and beasts of prey (393-493/1002-99), while saying that the caracal is good only for hunting the hare, quotes a fellow master of the art, Abu’l-Qāsem Eṣfahānī, as affirming that it can also catch ducks, bustards, and cranes (*Bāz-nāma*, p. 172).

The same author states (*ibid.*) that the technique of training the caracal, which “[was] captured a lot in ‘Erāq and Khorasan” for that purpose, is almost the same as the laborious procedure of training a cheetah; in particular, he recalls the use of the bit (of the bridle) and the fetter for preventing the caracal from sleeping (during the early period of training), and the necessity of training it how to ride pillion (with the trainer or bunter).

Closely related to the caracal is the lynx (*Felis lynx* L., = *Lynx lynx*), which occurs widely in some cold regions of Eurasia (in Asia, including the southern Caucasus, Transcaucasia, Armenia, Turkey, Persia, southern Turkestan, and Central Asian mountains). In Persia it is found in forested areas and also in open, rocky mountain slopes in Azarbaijan, and eastward through the central Alborz region to the vicinity of Tehran (Harrington, Jr., et al., p. 38, and color pl. 10; E‘temād, loc. cit., p. 167, and the distribution map, *ibid.*).

The lynx is larger than the caracal (about 82-105 cm long, without the black-tipped tail, and about 60-65 cm high at the shoulders). It has black ear tufts—a feature which, in addition to zoological kinship, may justify the name *sīāhgūš* erroneously applied to it by some modern authors (e.g., E‘temād, *ibid.*, who, however, unduly calls the caracal *kārākāl* in Persian). In classical sources the lynx is called *vašaq* (e.g., in Tonokābonī, p. 865, and in the *Borhān-e qāṭe‘*, ed. Mo‘īn, s.v.; *ašaq* [?] in Nasavī, op. cit., p. 173)—probably a word of Turkish origin (*wašaq* is the current name of the lynx in Arabic; cf. also Dozy, II, p. 816: *wašaq* “lynx fur”). According to Nasavī, the *ašaq* [?] is about the size of the *sīāhgūš*; has a soft gray coat which is white on the belly and with which pelisses (*pūstīns*, q.v.) are made; it abounds in the province of Šervān, where it



is captured and trained like the *sīāhgūš* to hunt hares. The author of the *Borhān-e qāṭe'*, loc. cit., says that the *vašaq*, found in Turkestan, resembles the fox, and that its pelts are made into *pūstīns*, which, reportedly, would guard against piles anyone who wears them. Tonokābonī has a more accurate description of the *vašaq*: It is much smaller than the leopard (*palang*) but looks like it in color and form; that is why it is called *paleng-e mūl* [lit. “leopard’s bastard”] in Tonokābon. Further, according to him, it has the same properties as the leopard: Wearing its fur excites sexual desire, enhances sexual potency, and prevents the formation of hemorrhoids, and its burnt hair helps cure old wounds. These virtues are different from those “beneficial uses” mentioned by Ḥobayš Teflīsī (6th/ 12th cent.) for the *sīāhgūš*: eating the meat of the latter, or taking internally its gall with rose water, makes one strong, brave, and intrepid (*Bayān al-šenā'āt*, p. 366).

The caracal is also known in classical Persian by the name (or nickname) of *parvāna(k)* (from Mid. Pers. *parwānag*) or its variant *farāna(k)*, arabicized as, *forāneq*, literally meaning “leader, guide, vanguard” (cf., e.g., Zamaḡsarī, I, p. 59; “*forāneq*: an army’s guide,” and Fīrūzābādī, III, p. 485: “*forāneq*, arabicized from Pers. *parvānak/g*: somebody who guides a courier on his route”). A wrong interpretation generally given by lexicographers of this appellation is this: “The *sīāhgūš* . . . is renowned as *šāṭer-e sīr* [the herald/forerunner of the lion] because it goes ahead of the lion and cries in order to warn the other animals of the lion’s coming” (*Ānand Rāj*, s.vv. *sīāhgūš*, *forāneq*, and *parvāna(k)*); but the following *bayt* quoted by the author from Kāqānī Šervānī is closer to the true interpretation [see below]: “Sire, thou art a lion and I am thy *parvāna*; the *parvāna* is better off under the lion’s protection”). The caracal is further known in Persian literature for this feature that it feeds on the leftovers of the lion’s repast. As Ḥamd-Allāh Qazvīnī puts it accurately (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, Pers. text, p. 46), “the *anāq* keeps company with the lion most of the time, partakes of the leftovers of its prey, but for fear of the lion’s assault, it does not go too near the latter” (this parasitic but cautious dependence of the caracal—symbolizing a greedy courtier—on the lion—as a mighty king—is turned into a short parable by Sa’dī in his *Golestān*, pp. 88-89). The facts about the caracal-lion interdependence in Africa as explained by P. Larousse (*Grand dictionnaire* III, s.v. *caracal*, mainly on the authority of the 18th-century French naturalist Buffon) may be summarized as follows: In its habitat in the hot regions of Africa, the caracal has to coexist with such other beasts of prey as the lion, the ounce, and the panther; but being smaller and weaker than them, it is at greater pains to find its food, and very often it has to content itself with



the leftovers of its formidable congeners. For safety's sake, however, it prefers to follow the lion because the latter, when sated, does not harm anybody. Sometimes it even accompanies the lion pretty closely, because, able as it is to jump quickly up a nearby tree, it does not fear the rage of the lion, which cannot chase it up a tree as a panther could. For its part, the caracal unwittingly makes up for the weak sense of smell of the lion, which thus takes advantage of the caracal's keener smell to scent and track down the preys from afar.

Both the caracal and the lynx have been declared "protected" animals in Persia, and the latest decree of the High Council of the [Persian] Department of the Environment (Šahrivar 1366 Š./September 1987) fixes at Rls 200,000 the fine for each hunted (killed) caracal or lynx.

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