

A hundred years ago, many animal problems in Bourron!

Current times bring us our share of problems related to the proliferation of certain animal species, such as the wild boar or the Asian hornet, which expand their territory every year. However, this phenomenon is not new, and our ancestors had to face similar "calamities" in the past. By consulting local archives from the 19th century, and particularly the municipal deliberation records of Bourron-Marlotte, we were able to identify some of these problems and discover the solutions implemented at the time to address them.

Rabbits and Hares



The hare by Olivier de Penne - Enseignement par les yeux, ca1870

As early as 1849, the owners of land near the recently constructed fence at Long Rocher complained of its inadequacy in protecting them from rabbit pests and requested that it be replaced with a wall. The forestry administration agreed to build this wall, on the conditions that the commune 1) undertake to have the 3,000 wedges necessary for this construction made and transport them at its own expense; 2) have the land containing the red earth excavated and also transport it at its own expense to the foot of the aforementioned wall; and 3) cut in the closest places enough

bundles of heather to cover this wall and transport them to the worksite.

For its part, the forestry administration undertakes to cover all the costs of constructing the said wall and its heather covering, as well as all the expenses required for its maintenance. It will authorize the Commune to cut a quantity of heather bales that will be double that required for the said roofing, so that its workers will be paid in kind and will not have to charge anything for their day's wages or for transporting the aforementioned heather to the worksite.

The Council, after carefully examining this project, accepts its conditions and votes the sum of 2,000 francs.

Big Game

Over the years, this problem of pest incursions continued and included large mammals that already inhabited the forest in large numbers, the object of royal or imperial hunts, and were then referred to as the big game of the forest. These roe deer, red deer, and wild boar already had the unfortunate habit of leaving their forest habitat, searching for food in the agricultural areas of the village of Bourron and its hamlet of Marlotte.



Roe deer hunting in Franche-Comté by Gustave Courbet, 1866 - Ordrupgaardsamlingen, Copenhagen

In 1894, the municipal council decided to solve this recurring problem with a *fence between the forest and the territory of Bourron over a length of 1,500 meters*: *The Mayor explained to the Council that crops were constantly being ravaged by deer and does in the land bordering the forest; that it would be necessary to erect a fence along the boundary of the municipal territory to protect properties from damage caused by these animals. Considering that it is impossible for the owners bordering the forest to enjoy the land they own; that the majority of their work is done in pure loss; that for a long time now this question of fencing has been discussed without being resolved; that it is impossible for the farmers to be reimbursed for the damage caused by game, unanimously approves the estimate drawn up by the mayor...*

Stray dogs



Following the proliferation of stray dogs and the associated risk of rabies transmission, the mayor cited a prefectural decree issued in 1868, which was enforced by the town's rural police officer: *Dogs found on public roads without an owner, or a muzzle will be seized and killed immediately.*

Maybugs



Drawing of maybugs by Pierre-Georges Deraisme, ca 1905

In 1901, the Municipal Council, *considering it important to encourage the destruction of maybugs, which caused such great damage to trees, decided to allocate a bonus of 0.40 francs per decaliter of maybugs destroyed. It included in the supplementary budget a sum of 40 francs for payment of this bonus to individuals, who would have to provide proof of the quantity of maybugs collected to the rural wardens.*

The same initiative was repeated in 1922, when a contribution was requested from farmers, based on the anticipated destruction of 270 kg of cockchafer. However, the performance of the collectors of these insects far exceeded this objective, with 700 kg of maybugs collected! *The council unanimously agreed to maintain the promised destruction premium at 2 francs per kilogram of insects destroyed and decided that the additional cost would be covered by the municipality's initial budget. In 1925, given the urgent need to destroy the maybugs, the Council decided to add a premium of 0.75 francs per kilogram to those paid by the Agricultural Office and the Department.*

Crows



Rook by William Levin, 18th century

In 1915, *the Council asked the Prefect to authorize rural wardens to use rifles to destroy crows within the commune.*

Field Mice



Field mice, 19th century engraving

In November 1913, *several members of the Council echoed farmers' complaints about the considerable damage caused by field mice and voles, particularly to artificial meadows, and also noted that the virus already used in the spring had not produced satisfactory results. A request was then made to the Prefect to assist farmers and allocate sufficient funds to purchase 100 bottles of virus.*

1 - Municipal deliberation records from Bourron-Marlotte archives are transcribed in italics in the text