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Mateusz ROZMIAREK*, Arkadiusz WŁODARCZYK**

OSTRICH HUNTING AS A FORM OF SPORTING PURSUIT IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PRESS

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Polowanie na strusie jako rodzaj sportu łowieckiego na łamach XIX-wiecznej prasy brytyjskiej

Streszczenie

Już od czasów starożytnych zwierzęta wykorzystywane były przez człowieka do różnorodnych celów. Pośród owych zwierząt znajdowały się ptaki, również nietoty, na czele ze strusiami. Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje próbę ukazania znaczenia polowań na strusie w różnych kulturach świata w XIX wieku na podstawie publikacji zamieszczonych w prasie brytyjskiej. Do napisania artykułu wykorzystano metodę historyczną, a materiał źródłowy do badań stanowiły notatki prasowe wydawane w Wielkiej Brytanii. Analiza źródeł wykazała, iż anglojęzycznemu czytelnikowi znane były zwyczaje polowania na strusie różnych ludów, żyjących na obszarach Ameryki Południowej oraz Afryki. Materiały prasowe pozwalały czytelnikom na szczegółowe zapoznanie się z przebiegiem polowań, czy też stosowanych do ich przeprowadzania technik, co mogło pośrednio przyczynić się także do włączenia strusi jako atrakcji w programach inscenizacji cyrkowych. Z kolei używana przez autorów artykułów prasowych nomenklatura jasno wskazuje, iż polowania na strusie określano mianem sportu, który stanowił zarówno wysokiej klasy rozrywkę, jak i dochodowe przedsięwzięcie.

Słowa kluczowe: Wielka Brytania, prasa, struś, polowanie, sport.

Abstract

Since ancient times, animals have been used by man for a variety of purposes. Among these were birds, including flightless birds, led by the ostriches. This article attempts to show the im-

* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5955-0790>; PhD, Department of Sports Tourism, Poznan University of Physical Education, Poland; e-mail: rozmiarek@awf.poznan.pl (corresponding author)

** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2263-2474>; PhD, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland

portance of ostrich hunting in different cultures of the world in the nineteenth century, based on publications in the British press. The historical method was used to write the article and the source material for the research was press releases published in Britain. The analysis of the sources showed that English-speaking readers were familiar with the ostrich-hunting customs of various peoples living in South American and African areas. The press materials allowed readers to learn in detail about the course of the hunt or the techniques used to carry it out, which could also indirectly contribute to the inclusion of ostriches as attractions in circus staging programmes. On the other hand, the nomenclature used by the authors of the press articles clearly indicates that ostrich hunting was described as a sport that constituted both high-class entertainment and a profitable enterprise.

Keywords: United Kingdom, press, ostrich, hunting, sport.

Introduction

Animals have accompanied humans since time immemorial. They have been utilized as aides to hunters, serving as a means of transportation, while also constituting sources of sustenance and valuable, often highly sought-after resources. It is unsurprising, therefore, that even in ancient times, animals were harnessed for various purposes. One only needs to mention horses as the principal mode of conveyance, forming the military backbone of numerous armies for centuries, until the nineteenth century. For the sake of entertainment, equestrian races and chariot races were organized at the Olympic Games in ancient Greece,¹ as well as at circus games in ancient Rome. Horses were also employed in hunting wild game and in the context of knightly tournaments. They constituted a fundamental component of the repertoire in modern circus performances, commencing from the latter half of the eighteenth century. Other examples encompass dogs and birds of prey, which, akin to horses, were employed in hunting. In the case of the former, racing events were also organized.²

¹ Z. Porada, *Starożytne i nowożytne igrzyska olimpijskie [Ancient and modern Olympic Games]*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza w Krakowie, Kraków 1980.

² More on the Utilization of Animals for Sporting, Recreational, and General Entertainment Purposes, see e.g. A. Jastrzębska, A. Gugolek, J. Strychalski, *Zwierzęta w sporcie, rekreacji i rozrywce. Cz. I [Animals in Sport, Recreation, and Entertainment. Part I]*, "Wiadomości Zootechniczne" 2017, no. 1, pp. 87–93; A. Jastrzębska, A. Gugolek, J. Strychalski, *Zwierzęta w sporcie, rekreacji i rozrywce. Cz. II [Animals in Sport, Recreation, and Entertainment. Part II]*, "Wiadomości Zootechniczne" 2017, no. 2, pp. 173–181; D. Słapek, *Sport i widowiska w świecie antycznym [Sports and Spectacles in the Ancient World]*, Homini, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Kraków – Warszawa 2010; W. Lipoński, *Rochwist i palant. Studium etnologiczne dawnych polskich sportów i gier ruchowych na tle tradycji europejskiej [Rochwist and Palant. An Ethnological Study of Historical Polish Sports and Physical Games in the Context of European Tradition]*, Wydawnictwo AWF w Poznaniu, Poznań 2004; M. Rozmiarek, A. Włodarczyk, *C. Gärtner, the Olympic Circus, and the Origins of Equestrianism in the Grand Duchy of Posen*, "The International Journal of the History of Sport" 2021, vol. 38, no. 16, pp. 1710–1728; A. Włodarczyk, M. Rozmiarek, *Circus shows in nineteenth-century Poland as pseudo-Olympics*,

It is worth noting that hunting, alongside tournaments, was one of the principal diversions of feudal lords during medieval times. Over time, it increasingly took on the guise of amusement and rivalry, a trend particularly pronounced in England. Two recognized as the oldest hunting treatises depict hunts as a form of sporting amusement.³

The increasing popularity of the so-called field sports in England, commencing from the latter half of the eighteenth century, prompted a growing consideration for the welfare of animals, resulting in the establishment of initially local organizations dedicated to this matter. One of the first was the London Society, founded in 1750, whose primary aim was the curtailment of poaching and the safeguarding of game. Similar societies arose in 1769, in Hampshire and in the 1780s in Norfolk. Several decades later, in 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was founded, under the patronage of Princess Victoria in 1835, and later granted royal status by Queen Victoria in 1840 (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – RSPCA). Concurrently, voices highlighting moral issues persisted, particularly questioning whether inflicting suffering upon any creature for the sake of pleasure is justifiable. However, since its inception, RSPCA maintained a stance not to condemn field sports. In the latter half of the 19th century, additional organizations focusing on animal protection emerged, among which The Humanitarian League, likely founded in 1891, held paramount importance. Supporters of field sports, on the other hand, established the National Sports Defence Association in 1884 to safeguard hunting, shooting, coursing, equestrian racing, and angling against political and moral opposition. Ultimately, in 1911, through the collaborative efforts of RSPCA and The Humanitarian League, the Animal Protection Act was enacted.⁴

Similarly to England, in the region of North America, hunting became a facet of American identity and tradition. During the colonial era, the then-untamed and uncharted lands of North America were depicted as a paradise for hunters, with individual colonies guaranteeing hunting rights to incentivize potential settlers to inhabit the region. Initially, however, settlers held a sceptical view, associating hunting on the one hand with the leisure of aristocrats, and on the other hand, with the wildness of the Native Americans. The shift came during the American Revolution (1775–1783), when hunters evolved into cultural heroes,

“Sport in History” 2023, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 1–27; C.A. Branigan, *Adopting the Racing Greyhounds*, Howell Book House, New York 2003. The aforementioned examples of animal utilization for recreational purposes certainly do not exhaust the topic; however, they do indicate the multifaceted use of various animal species both in sports and recreation over the course of years.

³ W. Lipoński, *Historia sportu [History of Sport]*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, pp. 237–238.

⁴ C.C. McKenzie, *The origins of the British field sports society*, “The International Journal of the History of Sport” 1996, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 177–191.

safeguarding natural rights, while in the nineteenth century, the widespread right to hunt became a sort of bastion against aristocracy, perceived by Americans as a source of their greatness.⁵

In complementing the cultural impact of hunting and entertainment involving animals, it is also necessary to reference literature and art, for this subject matter was often explored in works of writers, poets, and painters of bygone eras. An example could be the body of work by Wojciech Kossak and the motifs associated with the utilization of horses in the broad context of leisure activities.⁶

As previously mentioned, birds were also utilized for the purposes of broadly defined entertainment; however, the focus was not solely on flying birds, but also on those lacking the ability to soar through the air. In past years, all flightless birds were erroneously referred to as ostriches. Ostrich, in fact, is the term denoting a genus of birds, encompassing two species from the *Struthio* genus inhabiting Africa: the red-necked ostrich and the grey-necked ostrich.⁷ Presumably, ostriches existed around 40-55 million years ago and evolved into creatures standing up to four meters in height. Over time, however, they gradually diminished in size while concurrently developing an increasing capability for achieving high speeds while running.⁸ Ostriches are also recognized for their valuable feathers and the production of sizable eggs. Despite accompanying humanity from its inception, their role and utilization by humans have evolved through the ages. People were intrigued by ostriches even prior to the advent of agriculture.⁹ Yet, primary sources predominantly indicate hunting – as evidenced by prehistoric rock drawings portraying fleeing ostriches pursued by leopards, cheetahs, and humans. This endeavour was particularly emblematic of Arabian tribes, who sought after their prized meat as well as hides for crafting everyday

⁵ For more on the significance of hunting in American identity, see D.J. Herman, *Hunting and American Identity: The Rise, Fall, Rise and Fall of an American Pastime*, "The International Journal of the History of Sport" 2014, vol. 31, no. 1–2, pp. 55–71.

⁶ M. Mazurkiewicz, 'All the Pretty Horses': *Sports and Leisure in Polish Equine Painting – The Artistic and Literary Legacy of Wojciech Kossak (Artworks, Memoirs, Letters)*, "The International Journal of the History of Sport" 2020, vol. 37, no. 15, pp. 1531–1548. For further exploration of the cultural context of hunting, see M. Mazurkiewicz, *Sport w literaturze i kulturze. Konteksty historyczne i współczesne [Sport in Literature and Culture. Historical and Contemporary Contexts]*, Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, Kielce 2020; M. Mazurkiewicz, *American Sport. Observations and Essays*, Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, Kielce 2017; M. Mazurkiewicz, *Sport and Religion. Muscular Christianity and the Young Men's Christian Association. Ideology, Activity and Expansion (Great Britain, the United States and Poland, 1857–1939)*, Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, Kielce 2018.

⁷ P. Wagner, *The Ostrich Story*, Chameleon Press, Hong Kong 1986.

⁸ A.-M. Moysse-Jaubert, C. Nicolle, M.-A. Reveillon, H. Serres-Cousiné, C. Sourd, *Sawanna afrykańska [African Savannah]*, Wydawnictwo "Delta", Warszawa 1992.

⁹ R.K. Brooke, *Man/Ostrich Interactions: A Cultural History*, "Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa" 1995, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 153–163.

items or clothing.¹⁰ Mass hunting of ostriches to acquire coveted resources occurred intermittently throughout history until the latter half of the nineteenth century when the decline in their population led to a shift in human approach towards these birds, with a shift towards capturing them for the purpose of maintaining them in farm conditions.¹¹

State of Research, Source Material, and Methodology

To date, the Polish-language literature lacks a comprehensive study addressing the issue of ostrich hunting in the nineteenth century across various parts of the world, even though research concerning the utilitarian or recreational use of animals has touched upon this context with regard to birds. Among the works that have touched upon this topic to a varying extent, the article published in 2016 by Andrzej Gugolek, Agata Jastrzębska, and Janusz Strychalski titled *Wykorzystanie gołębi i innych gatunków ptaków w rekreacji człowieka* (en. *Utilization of Pigeons and Other Avian Species in Human Recreation*) can be mentioned,¹² as well as Adolf Dygasiński's book *Wielkie łowy* (en. *Great Hunts*) from 1924, in which one chapter is dedicated to ostriches and hunting them.¹³

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the significance of ostrich hunting in various cultures around the world during the nineteenth century, as portrayed in publications featured in the British press. The selection of source material for this historical analysis was not arbitrary, as Great Britain was a colonial powerhouse at the time, exerting control over territories spanning all continents. Moreover, it was a leading nation in numerous aspects of global culture, including physical culture. The policies pursued by this colonial power, such as the introduction and dissemination of British educational principles, facilitated the expansion of various sporting disciplines and the advancement of sports even among colonial societies. Furthermore, sport was utilized as a tool of control and integration, enabling British authorities to shape the identity of colonial communities and influence their allegiance to the empire.¹⁴

¹⁰ J.O. Horbańczuk, *Strusie [Ostriches]*, Zakład Wydawniczo-Reprodukcyjny Auto-Graf, Warszawa 2001, pp. 9–10.

¹¹ J. Hutton, *Introduction to the Ostrich Industry in Zimbabwe*, [in:] *Ostrich Workshop for Veterinarians*, University of Zimbabwe, Harare 1992, pp. 2–11.

¹² A. Gugolek, A. Jastrzębska, J. Strychalski, *Wykorzystanie gołębi i innych gatunków ptaków w rekreacji człowieka [Utilization of Pigeons and Other Avian Species in Human Recreation]*, "Wiadomości Zootechniczne" 2016, no. 2, pp. 90–95.

¹³ A. Dygasiński, *Wielkie łowy [Great Hunts]*, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Ignis", Warszawa 1924, pp. 107–116.

¹⁴ M.M. Kobierecki, *Dyplomacja sportowa. Sport w działaniach dyplomatycznych państw i aktorów niepaństwowych [Sports Diplomacy. Sport in the Diplomatic Activities of States and Non-State Actors]*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018.

The composition of this article employed a historical methodology, involving the retrieval of historical sources addressing the titular subject, followed by their selection and analysis. The source materials encompassed press titles published in nineteenth-century Great Britain, both at local and national scales, where information concerning ostrich hunting was sought.

The Evolution of Ostrich Utilization in Entertainment Over Time

Initially, humans utilized ostriches for their meat, skin, and valuable ostrich feathers, necessitating the domestication of these birds. This led to their incorporation into various cultural practices. In ancient times, this was exemplified by Egypt's ruler, Ptolemy II (285–246 BCE), who employed ostriches in elaborate processions. Riding ostriches was also a practice embraced by his wife, and a similar custom found resonance among ancient Roman women.¹⁵ In turn, Assyrian kings, particularly Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), captured ostriches for the purpose of housing them in public zoological gardens.¹⁶

In Roman amphitheaters, headless races involving ostriches were arranged. The spectacle entailed ceremonially decapitating the birds, which, before eventually collapsing, ran in circles. This type of entertainment was likely first organized during the reign of Emperor Commodus (180–192 CE). Allegedly, the ruler himself participated in such spectacles, striking the birds with a crescent-shaped blade.¹⁷ Nearly a century later, Emperor Probus (276–282 CE) reportedly ordered the killing of a thousand ostriches to distribute their meat among the audience.¹⁸ It is assumed that ostriches were killed in amphitheaters throughout the third century, and the transportation of these birds from Africa to Rome continued until at least the early fifth century. Apart from their use in spectacles, Romans also harnessed ostriches to chariots.¹⁹

Ostriches also served as an exclusive form of gift exchanged between rulers during diplomatic meetings. They would subsequently find their way to royal or zoological gardens. With time, they became one of many animal species showcased in travelling menageries at the beginning of the nineteenth century, eventually featuring in circus performances – a highly popular form of entertainment during that era that attracted people from all walks of life.²⁰ Ostrich-themed cir-

¹⁵ R.K. Brooke, *Man/Ostrich Interactions: A Cultural History...*, op. cit., pp. 153–163.

¹⁶ J.M. Aynard, *Animals in Mesopotamia*, [in:] A. Houghton Broderick (ed.), *Animals in Archaeology*, Praeger, New York 1972, pp. 42–68.

¹⁷ "Leicester Chronicle" 1833, October 5, p. 1.

¹⁸ J.M.C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art*, Thames and Hudson, London 1973.

¹⁹ J.O. Horbańczuk, *Strusie*, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁰ For more information on the subject of zoos and menageries, see A. Jakóbczyk-Gola, *Ogrody zwierząt. Staropolskie zwierzyńce i menażerie* [*Animal Gardens. Old Polish Zoological Gardens*]

cus shows made their debut in France and soon reached England as well. It is also noteworthy in this context that an episode involving the use of ostriches in circus performances occurred on Polish territories under foreign partitions.²¹ In 1853, the German circus entrepreneur Ernst Renz arrived with his Olympic Circus in the Prussian partition, specifically in Posen (present-day Poznan), the capital of the Grand Duchy of Posen. He presented, among other acts, a demonstration of riding on two black African ostriches. These birds were ridden by small Turks.²²

British Press on Ostrich Hunting

In addition to the utilitarian use of ostriches, hunting them also served as a form of entertainment. Information found in the nineteenth-century British press about ostrich hunting indicates that customs of peoples inhabiting regions such as South America, Africa, and Arab tribes related to ostrich hunting were described. These accounts also depicted the participation of travellers and colonists in these pursuits.

The oldest found mention dates back to 1818 and concerns hunting in South America. It is a brief account of a shipwreck survivor stranded at Bahía de Fodos Sontes Patagonia, published on December 7, 1818, in the *Morning Chronicle*. The survivor shared his story, detailing his five-month endeavour to secure sustenance. Apart from the most common game on that territory such as deer and hares, there was also a remarkable variety of wild birds, including scores of American ostriches.²³ It is worth noting that on the South American continent, there are only two flightless species: the grey rhea and the spotted rhea, commonly referred to as American or Pampas ostriches.

Mentions also appeared in the British press regarding the indigenous inhabitants of the South American Patagonian regions, including representatives of Eastern nations with unique cultural traditions. These groups constituted a nomadic population distinguished by their exceptional hunting skills and subsistence primarily on guanacos, hares, and pampas ostriches.²⁴ These societies

and Menageries], Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Muzeum Historii Polski, Warszawa 2021.

²¹ M. Rozmiarek, A. Włodarczyk, *From British Menageries and Hippodromes to the Olympic Circus in the Grand Duchy of Posen: The Origins of the Use of Ostriches in European Sport and Entertainment*, "European Review" 2023, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 291–307.

²² "Gazeta W. Xięstwa Poznańskiego" [Gazette of the Grand Duchy of Posen] 1853, June 19, p. 3. The source does not specify whether these were children, dwarves, or short-statured adults, although it is likely they were underage individuals of Turkish origin.

²³ "Morning Chronicle" 1818, December 7, p. 2.

²⁴ "Sussex Advertiser" 1831, March 14, p. 4.

shared a belief that the Milky Way represented a sort of hunting forest, wherein the souls of the deceased indulged in ostrich hunting.²⁵ This belief was intertwined with funeral rites and their notions of afterlife pleasures, wherein ostrich hunting occurred during the day, while revelries took place at night.²⁶ Ostrich hunting, highly popular among these tribes during their earthly existence, necessitated the use of specialized projectile weapons that, when striking the legs of a running bird, immobilized its movement.²⁷ Such projectile weapons, known as *bolas* or *boleadoras*, were also employed by *gauchos* – South American horsemen and hunters inhabiting these territories. *Gauchos* primarily hunted ostriches to acquire their valuable feathers, which were sought-after export commodities. In the mid-19th century, William MacCann, an English entrepreneur who traversed Argentina to expand trade relations while familiarizing himself with local customs, journeyed through that region.²⁸ MacCann witnessed such hunting, which he labelled as a sport, likely due to his English background and association with English hunting traditions – part of the previously described field sports. He described the ostrich hunting as follows: ‘Ostrich hunting is a favourite sport. The participants formed a circle and closed in on the birds gradually, until they became alarmed and fled. The hunters pursued and from a suitable distance threw bolas at the ostrich’s legs, bringing it down to the ground.’²⁹ Some *gauchos* in Buenos Aires also tested their lassos during ostrich hunts.³⁰

Ostrich racing was not solely an activity undertaken by the indigenous population; due to the ample availability of game, such as on the pampas, travellers also enthusiastically engaged in this entertainment.³¹ During such occasions, often with the support of *gauchos*, hunts and chases were conducted. These were preceded by a symbolic war cry shouted by the leader of the group.³²

²⁵ “Cumberland Pacquet, and Ware’s Whitehaven Advertiser” 1851, April 29, p. 4.

²⁶ “Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent” 1834, September 6, p. 4.

²⁷ “Birmingham Chronicle” 1824, January 1, p. 3.

²⁸ W. MacCann, *Two Thousand Miles’ Ride through the Argentine Provinces*, vol. 1, Smith, Elder & Co., London 1853, p. VI.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 164. In the original, this passage read as follows: “Hunting ostriches is a favourite sport. When a hunting-party is formed, it is customary to move in a circular form, gradually closing in upon the birds until they become alarmed, and seek for safety in flight; the hunters then give chase, and when within proper distance throw the bolas at their legs, and so bring them to the ground”. For more on the culture of the *gauchos* in Argentina, see A. Włodarczyk, *Upadek kultury Gauchos i rozwój sportu w Argentynie na przełomie XIX i XX wieku [The Decline of Gaucho Culture and the Development of Sports in Argentina at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries]*, [in:] Z. Dziubiński, M. Lenartowicz (eds.), *Kultura fizyczna a struktura społeczna [Physical Culture and Social Structure]*, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego Józefa Piłsudskiego w Warszawie, Salezjańska Organizacja Sportowa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Warszawa 2016, pp. 187–194.

³⁰ “Tipperary Free Press” 1849, January 6, p. 3.

³¹ “Globe” 1828, June 30, p. 3.

³² “Kendal Mercury” 1841, February 20, p. 1.

In order to provide a more comprehensive view of the information on ostriches in South America as presented in the British press, the *Armagh Guardian* featured a detailed description of the ostrich, characterizing it as a gigantic bird originating from Africa and most commonly found in the hotter regions of the world. It was noted to reach a height of seven to nine feet. The author of the article emphasized that ostriches are often gentle and harmless, feeding on vegetables. They were frequently compared to cassowaries or camels (hence the term *camel bird* is used to refer to ostriches).³³

In 1844, the British press likely featured the first mention of ostrich hunting in Africa. This coincided with the general fascination with African game hunting, which is dated around 1848 and is attributed to the Scottish traveller Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming. He had engaged in intensive hunting activities across southern Africa in the preceding five years.³⁴ According to the press, in the southern part of the continent, it was often observed that ostrich flocks were found foraging alongside quaggas, an extinct subspecies of steppe zebra from the nineteenth century. When the ostrich was driven to extreme conditions, it frequently entered into a state of fury and inflicted serious wounds with its claws. The relatively unknown Dr. Shaw, likely the author of the mention, described a person who was torn apart by the enraged ostrich's claws. This particular ostrich was domesticated and gentle toward those it was familiar with, yet it was aggressive and violent towards strangers. In Arabia and North Africa, the pursuit of ostriches was considered 'one of the most demanding exercises for both the Arab rider and his mount'. This pursuit depended not only on speed but also on agility, including skills such as firing a pistol or throwing a djerid – a five-foot-long, sharp-tipped stick made from wild olive or tamarind wood.³⁵ This suggests that ostrich hunting was also a form of comprehensive physical training.

Five years later, a narrative account provided further information about an expedition by the Boers, which described the entire hunting process in great detail, including the behaviour of the ostrich. The hunters set out on horseback in groups of three or four. Their main destinations were vast, open plains. The technique for capturing the birds involved chasing them at a short distance, with each member of the group taking turns, as a solitary straight-line sprint would easily allow the ostrich to outpace even the swiftest horse. Consequently, the ostrich fled from successive pursuers, and when it began to tire, it would eventually abandon the race and hide its head in the bushes, relying solely on the possibility of kicking its opponent for defence. This situation, on the one hand,

³³ "Armagh Guardian" 1845, October 14, p. 4.

³⁴ For more on Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming's hunting, see A. Thompsell, *Hunting Africa. British Sport, African Knowledge and the Nature of Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015, pp. 12–13.

³⁵ "Lancaster Gazette" 1844, February 10, p. 4.

facilitated capturing the bird, but on the other, it demanded a degree of caution. According to the correspondent, a single kick from an ostrich was sufficient to even break a person's thigh.³⁶ In another account, a five-person relay of ostrich hunters was described. They were positioned one mile apart from each other. The danger for the rider stemmed from the ostrich's hazardous wing movements, which could even lead to death. Additionally, attention was drawn to the necessity of minimizing the burden on the horses. This often involved using the lightest possible saddle, reins, and gentle bits, as well as carrying a water skin to periodically cool and moisten the horse's bit.³⁷

Different ostrich-catching techniques were employed by the Bushmen, who traversed the plains dressed in the skin of the specific bird. They imitated its gait and movements, and when the ostrich came within their field of vision, they shot a poisoned arrow to seal its fate. Conversely, upon discovering an abandoned ostrich nest, the Bushmen would conceal themselves nearby, waiting for the return of the birds. Once the individuals returned, they would launch an attack.³⁸

In another press note, focusing exclusively on ostrich hunting within Arab culture, it was deemed the most rigorous test to which a horse was usually subjected. Ordinary training was inadequate to qualify a horse for this sport. Notably, the author of the mention directly refers to ostrich hunting as a sport, likely drawing a parallel with hunts involving horses and other animals. Only a specific preparatory course, called *lechaha*, guaranteed proper readiness for participation. This training involved not only appropriate exercises but also a special diet. Eight or seven days prior to the chase, horses were fed solely barley and provided with water once a day at sunset, coinciding with the time they were washed. Furthermore, their equipment was meticulously examined and reduced to the essential minimum – headgear was removed, Moroccan rugs were taken off, and the saddle and stirrups were replaced with the lightest options availa-

³⁶ "Liverpool Albion" 1849, December 17, p. 9. In this case, it is worth quoting this passage in its entirety in English, as it includes the term *sportsmen*, which was used to refer to hunters: "Capturing An Ostrich. – The Boers, when in quest of the ostrich, go out well mounted, in parties of three and four. The birds are generally found grazing on the wide, open plains, and when first started, instead of going straight a-head, by which means the ostrich could easily distance the fleetest horse, like a bunted hare, he circles round in his course, steadily pursued, at a distance, by one of the sportsmen. The others meanwhile, gathering towards the centre of the wide area, around which the bird, with outstretched neck and open wings, keeps on his circling flight, are at hand, to relieve each other in the chase; till at last the poor ostrich, overmatched by a constant succession of fresh pursuers, when completely exhausted, gives up the race in despair, throws himself headlong into a bush, and is then easily captured by the hunter; who, however, requires some precaution to effect this finale to the chase, as a single kick from the ostrich has often been known to break a man's thigh."

³⁷ "Reading Mercury" 1853, June 11, p. 4.

³⁸ "Newcastle Courant" 1850, August 9, p. 6.

ble. According to Arab tradition, after such preparation, ‘the horse’s belly diminished while its chest, back, and shoulders remained in good condition, capable of enduring significant fatigue.’³⁹ According to the author, the most favourable time for engaging in this sport was mid-summer, as higher temperatures resulted in the ostriches having less energy for self-defence. Ten desert riders, referred to as djerid warriors by the author, embarked on the expedition accompanied by servants and camels, suggesting they hailed from higher social strata. Their equipment included water-filled water skins, barley for the horse, flour, a type of roasted flour known as *rouina*, dates, a cooking pot, leather thongs, horseshoes, nails, and arrowheads. During the hunting trip, Arabs exclusively wore linen or cotton shirts, lightweight woollen trousers or leggings, breathable scarves wrapped around their necks and ears known as *haouli*, as well as sandals tied with strings.⁴⁰

The entire course of the hunting expedition... was detailed in the subsequent part of the article. The author used genuinely sporting terminology, describing the hunt as a sporting competition and referring to those participating in it as sportsmen. This usage was influenced, much like in MacCann’s case, by the author’s English origin and the tradition that labelled hunting as a sport. Prior to the commencement of the hunt, a thorough analysis of the terrain was conducted to ascertain the areas with the highest ostrich population – typically grassy landscapes, especially shortly after the rainy season. Then, the sportsmen would set out early in the morning after a long journey to the designated location, often lasting a whole day or two. Upon arrival, they would pause and dispatch two scouts to identify the largest possible number of ostriches. When spotting such a group of flightless birds, the scouts would lie down and conceal themselves. One of them would remain on watch, while the other would sneak closer to inform the group of the opportunity for a sporting encounter. The sportsmen approached the competition with great caution. The closer they got to the birds, the more they aimed to remain unnoticed. On flat terrain, they utilized the nearest hillock as cover, behind which they would lie down. Upon confirmation by the scouts that the ostriches were still in the same area, each participant would prepare themselves by depositing their baggage and mounting their horses. The servants and camels followed closely behind, carrying food and drinks for the participants. The hunters formed a perimeter around the game, sharing the space among themselves and maintaining a significant distance (owing to the exceptional vision of the ostriches). Fully prepared for action, they signalled their servants to rush ahead and scare the ostriches. The frightened birds would scatter chaotically, encountering the sportsmen, who initially refrained from engaging with them, except for repelling their advances and main-

³⁹ “General Advertiser for Dublin, and all Ireland” 1854, February 11, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

taining them within the encirclement. This already required a suitable level of speed, agility, and endurance. The birds, however, attempted to flee in any direction, until eventually, due to exhaustion and breathlessness, they started flapping their wings – a clear signal for the sportsmen to proceed to the second stage of the competition. This phase involved each participant individually pursuing a previously identified ostrich. Outpacing the bird during the chase enabled a skilful strike with a club to the particularly vulnerable head of the ostrich. This action caused the fleeing bird to collapse, and the sportsman would then proceed to bleed it out and end its life, taking care to keep the neck separated from the rest of the body to protect the feathers. Depending on the approach of the individual sportsman, there was also the option of trailing the progressively slower, stunned, and bleeding bird until it succumbed to exhaustion. Subsequently, the skin and feathers were carefully removed. After the conclusion of the competitions and the arrival of the camels along with the servants, the interior of the ostrich carcasses was liberally salted. A fire was then kindled, and the ostrich fat was rendered down. Once fully melted, it was poured into a bag made from the skin, thighs, and legs of the ostrich, securely tied at the bottom. The sportsmen would consume the seasoned and peppered remaining meat while the horses were watered and fed barley. Regardless of their exhaustion from the pursuit, this marked the initial phase of recuperation, further extended at the site where they left their baggage. Here, the sportsmen would spend at least two days to calm and restore their horses after this unusual form of entertainment. After this period, they would make their way back to their homes, sometimes only sending the spoils ahead through their servants to ensure the acquired goods reached their destination in the freshest state possible.⁴¹

Finally, it is worth mentioning that as part of utilizing ostriches in circus enterprises, shows featuring hunts involving these animals were presented. An example of this can be found in the circus program of Batty's Hippodrome, where such displays took place in 1851.⁴² Circus races featuring trained ostriches indeed provided audiences with a form of entertainment that was often unprecedented before, adding a unique and captivating element to the circus performances.⁴³

Conclusion

Humans have utilized ostriches for various purposes, both utilitarian and recreational, since ancient times. Commodities acquired from hunting, such as skins, meat, feathers, and fat, were subsequently sold or utilized for daily suste-

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² "Morning Advertiser" 1851, July 10, p. 6.

⁴³ "Era" 1852, January 4, p. 12.

nance. The fat, for instance, was used for consumption alongside bread, in preparing couscous or other food items, and occasionally employed as a remedy for various ailments in exceptional circumstances.⁴⁴

An analysis of the British press revealed that hunting customs of various indigenous peoples, living in the regions such as South America or Africa, were known to European and English-speaking readers. Thanks to articles, reports, and accounts from travellers, readers could mentally journey to distant continents, deepen their knowledge about the hunting traditions of indigenous people, and learn about the diverse hunting techniques employed by communities in those described areas. The impact of these narratives and descriptions on their recipients could have been significant, as the fascination with unfamiliar lands and their inhabitants fostered an interest in geography, ethnography, and anthropology. This might have indirectly influenced the inclusion of ostriches as attractions in circus performances. As finding a live ostrich in Great Britain was rare and journeys to distant countries were neither easy nor cheap, circuses began incorporating exotic animals, including ostriches, into their programmes to arouse the curiosity and wonder of the audience.

A significant aspect is also the nomenclature used by the authors of the newspaper articles, where they clearly labelled ostrich hunting as a sport. This likely allowed the English-speaking readers to associate this phenomenon with the deeply rooted tradition of English pastimes known as *field sports*, which also included hunting. From the content of the uncovered reports, an image emerges of hunting the world's largest birds as an exciting and thrilling form of entertainment, highly valued by equestrians. Simultaneously, it appeared to be a profitable venture.

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⁴⁴ "General Advertiser for Dublin, and all Ireland" 1854, February 11, p. 3.

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