



Sandscript

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Cinnamon-breasted bunting (top) and African grey shrike (bottom) are just two of the Sabel and Sahara's many birds.

Zoos making a world of difference

This October, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) holds its annual meeting at St Louis Zoo. *Sandscript* 6 is being issued to coincide with this meeting and our editorial is by recent ex-President Emeritus of The Living Desert, and newly inducted SCF Board Member, Karen Sausman.

Zoos have been strong proponents of reintroduction programs and habitat conservation in the Middle East and North Africa for well over 40 years. One of the first programs was the establishment of the "world herd" for the captive propagation of the critically endangered Arabian oryx. This was quickly followed by breeding programs for other Middle Eastern and North African antelopes, including scimitar-horned oryx, addax, and slender-horned gazelles, as well as programs for carnivores, such as the fennec and sand cat.

Zoological staff from North America and Europe developed regional and international studbooks to coordinate breeding programs between institutions for almost every species of endangered North African antelope.

Funding for the development and management of these studbooks and regional management programs has always been born by zoos. More recently many of these same zoos have been on the forefront of developing reintroduction programs through direct action with governments and organizations within their range states.

As an individual dedicated to the conservation of the world's deserts – its animals and plants, I have enjoyed working with my institution and many others around the world that have made incredible commitments to funding conservation work in the Middle East and North Africa and who are now funding the work of the Sahara Conservation Fund. Without the project and core funding support from zoos, SCF probably would not and could not exist. As our Executive Director, John Newby, says, "It is wonderful to see how zoo support is not only making a SCF a success but also bringing the world zoo community together as never before on the conservation of the Sahara's threatened wildlife."

As a member of the world zoo



World Association of Zoos and Aquariums | **WAZA**
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community, I am proud of what SCF is achieving with zoo support and I encourage all of my colleagues to continue their support.

Karen Sausman

Editor's note:

As we go to press, SCF is proud to announce the launch of a new initiative to develop a global strategy for the reintroduction of the scimitar-horned oryx, a species extinct in the wild since the 1990s. In partnership with SCF, this is being spearheaded and funded by the Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort in the United Arab Emirates and is another glowing example of the superb role the world zoo community is playing to actively address global conservation issues. Thank you Al Ain!



First lively batch of incubated Nigerien ostriches (Photo: Thomas Rabeil/SCF)

Feathery godmother

Nigerien TV star, Ms. Hadjara Gagara, is our ostrich program's very first local sponsor and godmother in the newly launched *Adopt an Ostrich* scheme. While helping us film the introduction to a new documentary on community-based conservation, Hadjara fell in love with the recently hatched ostrich chicks and donated her entire fee to the project and to the upkeep of the little birds. Her support will provide food and veterinary care. Hadjara's donation will we hope be the first of many and SCF collaborator, Vincent Turmine, has designed a beautiful poster to advertise the scheme and a certificate for the lucky godparents. If you would also like to help by adopting an ostrich, just contact [SCF](#).

2009 has seen SCF and its partners in Niger and abroad further develop its ground breaking ostrich program through artificial incubation of ostrich eggs

provided by local owners. Considered very much as a pilot year to learn how best to supplement natural incubation through the use of a special incubator provided last year by the zoos of St Louis and San Diego, initial results are promising and much experience has been gained through the process. One thing is very clear, ostrich rearing is complicated and requires technical, veterinary and husbandry inputs at many levels, especially with care of the chicks and breeding birds, maintenance of a secure and stable environment for the incubator, and post hatching monitoring and nutrition of the chicks. Maintaining constant heat and humidity during incubation is no easy thing when ambient temperatures soar to over 45°C and humidity rockets between less than 20% to over 95% in a matter of hours. The frequent power cuts also pose special challenges, calling for at least

one and preferably two backup generators. With veterinary and technical support from our partners in the AZA Ratite TAG, together with the strong cooperation of our main local NGO partner, CERNK, we are getting there and are looking forward very much to the next breeding season which should begin in October.

New grants from Houston Zoo's Zoos & Aquariums Caring for Conservation (ZACC), the John Ball Zoological Society and the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, together with ongoing support from St Louis Zoo and the Smithsonian's National Zoo, will help SCF further develop the program, notably through the construction of new breeding enclosures, enhanced support for food and veterinary care, incubation and an all-important public awareness campaign.





Captured by a remote camera, this addax is heading for shade and shelter from the 110°F hot season temperatures (Photo: SCF)

Mad dogs and Englishmen...

8 AM and it's already 95°F. By midday it will be well over 110° and apart from the odd gazelle heading purposefully for shade, absolutely nothing else is moving. Surviving the long, dry, hot season calls for stamina and a not insignificant dose of guile and good sense. Needless to say, the only large mammals daft enough to be dashing about is our small party of biologists. There is method in our madness, though, and we are in Termit to study just how the wildlife copes. Over the next 10 days we will travel more than 600 miles over rugged desert terrain to count wildlife and compare the results with similar missions carried out in other seasons. The big question is what do the addax do when it gets so hot? They can't burrow like many of the smaller mammals, there are no trees for shade in the desert, neither is there any water. Previous work suggests they leave the

open desert and come closer to the mountains to find shade and greener vegetation. We have pin-pointed a few strategically located shade trees for study, including setting up remote cameras to record any wildlife activity around them.

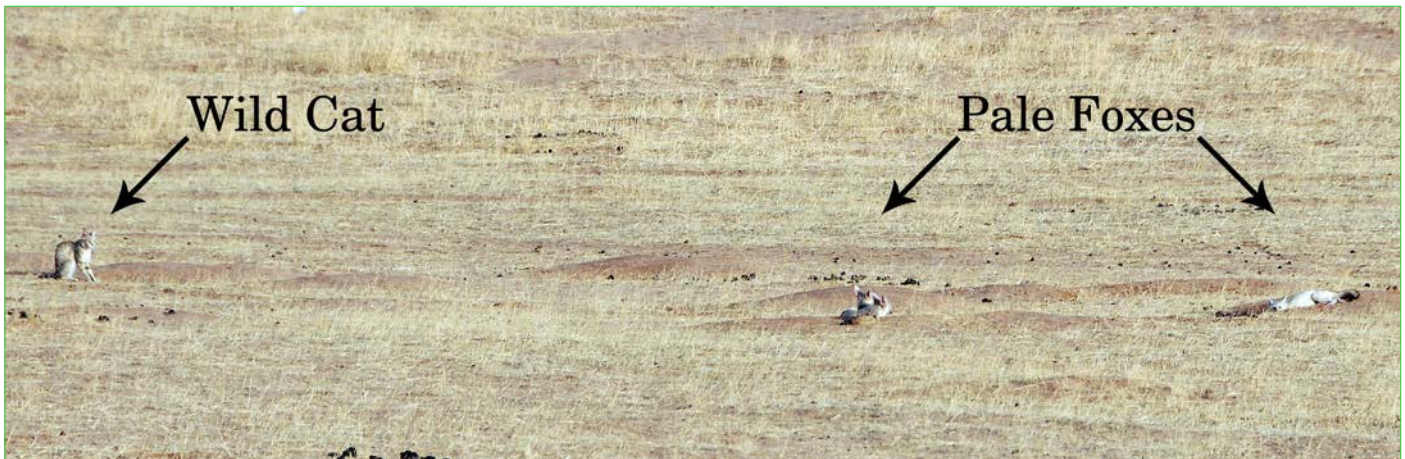
Heading out into the sands, the dunes are studded with the neat little footprints of gazelles passing from plant to plant for a look and a nibble. Where there are large clumps of tussock grass, they have dug out substantial cool burrows in which to shelter. Disturbed from his siesta, one gazelle shot frantically from a deep crevice in a rock wall barely big enough to squeeze through.

Although incredibly hot, we are 'lucky' to have fabulous visibility and as the trip progresses we pick up addax tracks in the heart of the desert. Each time we note they are associated with areas of green shoots of the

spiky tussock grass, *Stipagrostis*. No green shoots, no addax. We eventually spot a couple of small herds grazing on the tussocks. The addax appear to be in great shape but there are not many of them. Where are the others?

Navigating along the interface between sandy desert and mountain range the question is quickly answered as we find five separate herds, all ensconced under shady trees with easy escape routes to the open dunes. Even better, our remote camera has come up trumps and we have over 3,000 images of sheltering addax! Spending most of the daylight hours in the shade, addax feed and move mainly at night, conserving precious energy and water to deal with the hot season. Gradually the picture is falling into place; one that will help us conserve this incredible animal and identify those habitats and areas critical to its survival.





Wild cats and pale foxes share the same colony in apparent harmony (Photos: John Newby & Thomas Rabeil)

Strange bedfellows

In unique photographs and film footage, SCF scientists have recorded a mixed colony of wild cats and pale foxes. As part of its wildlife monitoring program in Niger, the colony has been under observation for some time and it would appear the cohabitation is perfectly harmonious, with both cats and foxes freely moving around each other without concern. Any advantages to joining forces remain to be seen. As do many other questions pertaining to the area's extraordinary community of small to medium sized carnivores. How do the various small cats and foxes share overlapping

habitats? What do they eat? And what is the impact of persecution on their conservation status? To answer these questions, SCF has joined forces with Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) and is funding an initial two-year research program as part of its Termit project.

In July, WildCRU researcher, Seamus MacLennan, arrived in Niger to begin work. The project is a fine example of the exemplary role zoos are playing in SCF's program. Core support is being provided by an AZA CEF grant, with

additional funding from Oregon Metro Zoo, St Louis Zoo and Gilman International Conservation. An emergency appeal for a reliable vehicle for the grueling desert work was answered immediately and in remarkably generous fashion by Wildlife World Zoo & Aquarium, Zoo New England, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Fresno Chaffee Zoo, St Louis Zoo and its AAZK chapter, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center and Buffalo Zoo. With private donations from Lynn Hall, Sheri Hannah and Adam Eyres we are all set to answer some intriguing questions. Thank you one and all!



Back in the saddle again...

It's great to be back online. And as you will see, we have spent the past few months completely updating our website to make it even more user friendly,

interactive and informative. Thanks for your patience. And thanks in advance for your feedback. We are always grateful for suggestions on how best to com-

municate, inform and share the splendour and uniqueness of the Sahara and its amazing but sadly imperilled wildlife. Just click [here](#) and go online.





Kelley Bishop (left), Capt. Djigo (2nd left) and Col. Mama Balla Gueye (centre in uniform) inspect the new game fence at Katané

Exotic Wildlife Association

The Exotic Wildlife Association (EWA) is a true Friend of the Sahara. Under the leadership of Executive Director, Charlie Seale, and Board President, Don Tarpey, EWA's membership has grown from 800 to 3700 members. At the same time, EWA has worked diligently to identify ways to further its already substantial commitment to conservation. Were it not for captive breeding programs in both the private sector and in zoos, there would be no scimitar-horned oryx left on the planet, as this species has been extinct in the wild for close to 30 years now. Many of the Sahara's key antelope species thrive in such captive populations and can serve as valuable genetic reservoirs for reintroduction programs. Larry John-

son, chair of the EWA's conservation committee, has been tireless in his efforts to mobilize support for projects like the recently completed infrastructure improvements in the Ferlo National Park, Senegal. In partnership with park authorities and SCF, EWA arranged for the donation, shipment, and installation of much-needed fencing in Ferlo to expand the carrying capacity there for scimitar-horned oryx, dama and dorcas gazelles introduced to this fenced reserve since 2002.

With over 4 km of game fencing donated by the Stay-Tuff Company and tools from Uvalco Supply, SCF's Kelley Bishop travelled to Ferlo to work with park conservator Djigo and colleagues to blaze and fence a

4 km extension to the Katané enclosure, effectively increasing the area under protection by 50%. With the current wet season well underway, the vegetation inside the enclosure is already greening up and will soon be ready for the introduction of antelopes and gazelles.

Thanks to EWA a further 3 km of fencing is on its way to Niger to help develop infrastructure for ostrich conservation. SCF is grateful for the vision and the leadership EWA has shown in looking beyond its own fences for meaningful ways to contribute directly to conservation in the wilds of Africa. EWA's membership can be rightfully proud of the effort its organization has made to ensure a future for wildlife in the Sahara.



Everyone's rushing to see our new website. Don't be left behind!

www.saharaconservation.org



Sandscript is the twice-yearly newsletter of SCF, the **Sahara Conservation Fund**. It is edited by SCF CEO John Newby. To subscribe to or sponsor **Sandscript** please click [here](#). SCF is grateful to Perrine Beguinot, Bill Houston, Olivier Born, Kelley Bishop and Thomas Rabeil for text and images used in this issue

Click [here](#) to Visit our exciting new website!



SCF's mission is to conserve the wildlife of the Sahara and bordering Sahelian grasslands.

Our vision is of a Sahara that is well conserved and managed, in which ecological processes function naturally, with plants and animals existing in healthy numbers across their historical range; a Sahara that benefits all its inhabitants and where support for its conservation comes from stakeholders across all sectors of society.

To implement our mission, we forge partnerships between people, governments, the world zoo and scientific communities, international conventions, non-governmental organizations and donor agencies. A powerful network with a common goal – the conservation of deserts and their unique natural and cultural heritage.

If you would like to know more about our work and how to contribute to our projects, please [contact us](#). We would love to hear from you!

Help SCF fight polio

Working with local communities to address pressing social issues as part of the search for equitable and lasting conservation outcomes is at the heart of SCF's mission. So is communications. In marrying the two, SCF has launched a campaign on *Facebook* to address the need for action to improve health care for hundreds of people living in and around the Termit conservation area of Eastern Niger. Special focus is on getting vaccinations for treatable diseases, such as polio, measles and yellow fever, to these far flung and rarely visited communities. For each dollar raised for this campaign an

equivalent sum has been pledged by SCF thanks to a generous grant from St Louis Zoo for humanitarian aid. So far, SCF has been involved in two health missions carried out by Niger's local medical services and supported by local NGOs *Les Nouveaux Constructeurs* and *Education & Santé Sans Frontières* under the most able guidance of Ms. Perrine Beguinot.

During the first sortie, over 300 people were vaccinated and nearly 700 doses dispensed. At the same time, the medical staff were able to treat over 160 other people for a wide variety of illnesses

and problems that would otherwise have gone untreated. A second, follow up mission has now been completed, with others planned for the coming year.

So far we have raised over \$1000 from our Facebook supporters and are happy to note nearly 500 people have signed up to the Save Saharan Wildlife cause posted on the site. Please join us in supporting the cause and helping eradicate horrors like polio, measles and tetanus. The cause can be found at the following link:

<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/264340>

