

ISSUE 29 - SPRING 2021

# Sandscript

An eye on the conservation of the wildlife of the Sahara and the Sahel



The biannual publication of the Sahara Conservation Fund,  
only organization dedicated uniquely to the biodiversity  
of the Sahara and Sahel





# SAND SCRIPT

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Welcome to Issue 29 of Sandscript! This edition's big story is about the 20th annual meeting of the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group from May 17 to 20 of this year, which was 100% digital for the first time ever! Indeed, like so many organizations, SCF has had to adapt to pandemic-imposed restrictions, including those that make it more difficult for participants to travel. On the bright side, the digital format, being practical and easy to access, allowed more people than usual to attend. Overall, it turned out to be very fruitful, according to the many participants who shared their opinions in a survey distributed after the event. This issue provides an overview of the content and organization of the forum in an article offering you a glimpse of the event and to allow some of you to relive the experience.

The issue also presents an article summarizing what SCF and our partners have achieved since late 2019 in reintroducing the addax into the wild, where the species is now practically extinct. Along with the scimitar oryx, the addax is one of the most iconic species in the Sahelo-Saharan zone. As such, it has attracted a great deal of

attention and much of the conservation efforts from SCF and our partners.

And lastly, we are also publishing a series of photographs from the logbook of John Newby – senior advisor, former director, and co-founder of the Sahara Conservation Fund. The photos were taken during a 10-day field trip to Niger's Termit & Tin Toumma National Natural Reserve, that Newby went on along with a crew of SCF and partner staff members. That was in 2009, back when it was not yet a protected area.

We encourage everyone to read the full text, which can be found on our website. Although a 12-year-old piece might seem outdated, the fact that it is previously unpublished, combined with recent news from the Reserve – some of whose land was officially opened to oil drilling in January 2021 – makes this publication timely. Back in the early 2000s, SCF was the most active organization on the ground, working to get the values, natural wealth, and importance of this zone recognized in the context of conservation activities leading to the Reserve's creation in 2012. Reading or re-reading these pages today is a helpful reminder of how important it is to keep fighting, one way or another, to protect the area and its unique nature, culture and history.

Sandscript

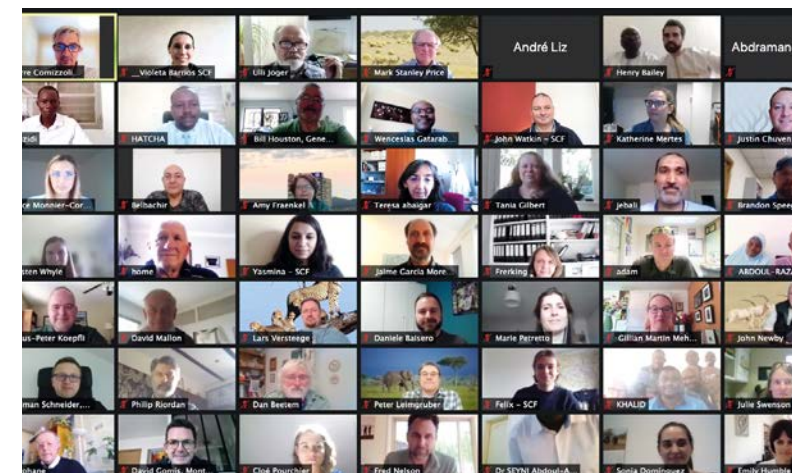
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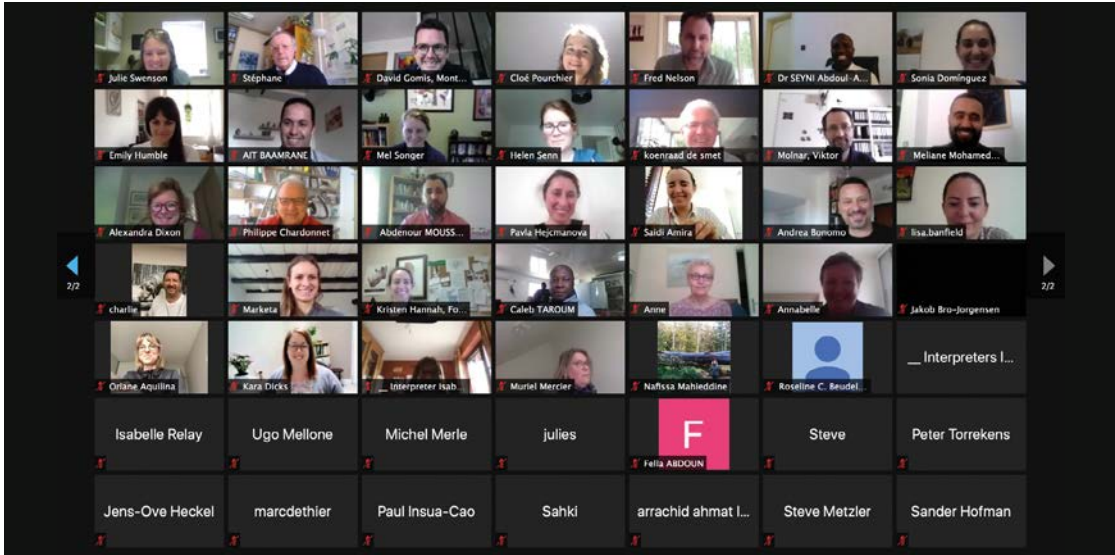
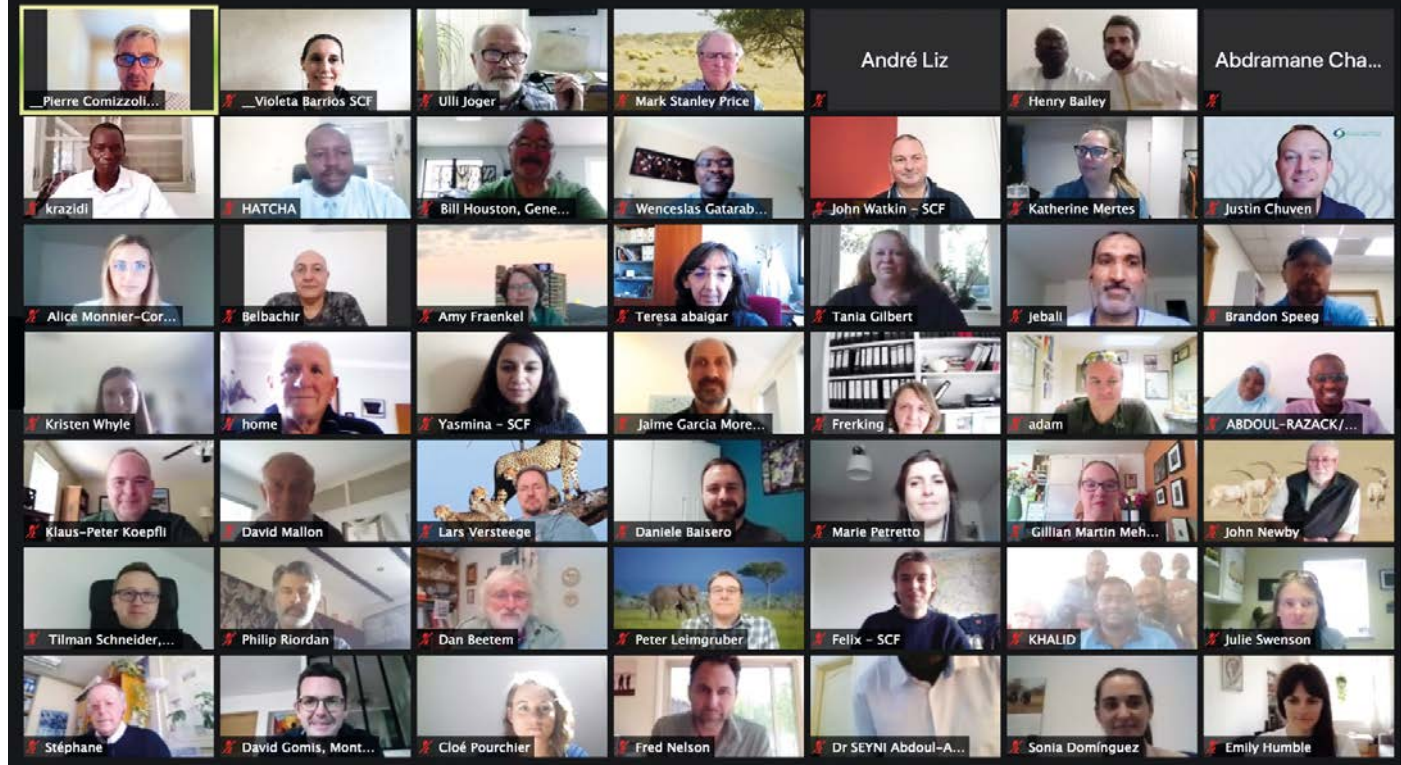
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## Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group (SSIG)

# Facing the challenges: the 2021 meeting of the SSIG

EAR FRIENDS, THE SITUATION IS CERTAINLY DIFFICULT. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS A BROAD CONSENSUS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING A BETTER WORLD, AND OF APPROACHING THIS CRISIS, AND THE FUTURE, BY TRANSFORMING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE". SO SPOKE IBRAHIM THIAW, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION. WITH THESE FINE WORDS, APPRECIATION FOR SSIG AND HIS ENCOURAGEMENT, THE 2021 SSIG MEETING GOT OFF TO A GREAT START.

After the disappointment of having to cancel the 2020 meeting due to the Covid virus, there was tremendous interest in having a meeting in 2021, even if it had to be virtual, with participants from many countries logging in from their homes and offices.

The virtual meeting also offered some great advantages – no travel costs, visas, and registration fees – allowing more people than ever to participate. Organized by themes, we were able to aim for wider impact and attention to the major conservation issues facing the biodiversity of the Sahara and Sahel.

In the run up to the event, a small team from the SCF staff, Board, and its Conservation & Science Committee marketed the meeting widely, resulting in some 180 people registering, almost twice as many as in previous years. The meeting was organized around three sections, each introduced by a significant keynote spokesperson presenting a headline address. The themes selected were: 'Geopolitics, climate change and society in the Sahelo-Saharan region', 'Large-scale conservation and development', and 'Species and Sites Conservation'.

Thirty presentations were submitted in all. And while it is impossible to mention each presentation: suffice it to say all were of extremely high standard and each speaker made

the most of the mere eight minutes allotted them. The full programme and speaker's' slide presentations can be found by following this link: <https://saharaconservation.org/20-ssig-meeting-videos-abstracts/>.

After Ibrahim Thiaw's keynote address, we had four talks on aspects of land restoration in the Sahel, with considerable attention to the ongoing implementation of the Great Green Wall project: all very topical at the start of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. The benefits of tree planting for biodiversity were challenged in a further talk in terms of potential risks to native biodiversity; on the other hand, the benefits off restoring land productivity for people and livelihoods was well demonstrated in Burkina Faso, and attention drawn to the potential for carbon sequestration in restored or healthy aridland soils.

Our second keynote presentation was by Philippe Mayaux of the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships. Based on the EU's work in Benin's Park W, Arly and Pendjari, northern Cameroon, and northern Kenya, he made the case that real impacts require coordination between the factors of land cover, protected areas, key landscapes for conservation and development, management

of surface waters, and landscape restoration.

An African Parks Network (APN) presentation was a natural follow-on, describing its successful model for large-scale conservation across Africa. APN methodology is to look for anchor protected areas on the basis that it is more cost-effective to conserve intact ecosystems than to restore them. If the protection of an anchor protected area is effective, then APN will build on success and take over management of secondary and adjoining protected areas, and the further restore buffer zones, adding them to create potentially vast areas under conservation management.

An assessment of Key Biodiversity Area in the region was presented, followed by use of a lizard species to identify historical climate refugia in the Sahara highlands, and the importance of the East Atlantic flyway for migrant birds. Assessments of arid lands for biodiversity conservation in Algeria and Tunisia were described; SCF activities in Chad were highlighted with talks on insights into the nomadic residents of Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim reserve, and the status of the reintroduction of oryx and addax.

The third themed keynote presentation, introducing the 'Sites and Species' session, was by Amy Frankael, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species. Amy reiterated the CMS' concern for species of the Sahel and Sahara, stating how the 2020 Conference of Parties had reaffirmed and strengthened its Sahelo-Saharan Megafauna Concerted Action Plan.

This was followed by several presentations on the region's antelopes – including addax and dorcas in Morocco, and with a focus on dama gazelles through their challenging capture in Chad, genomics in support of their conservation, monitoring of the

species in Niger; one especially notable highlight was the 50th anniversary of "Operation Mohor", which captured the founders of the Spanish population in 1971. Their descendants have since been used to repopulate many sites in Africa. Aspects of the Chad oryx reintroduction were covered in several presentations, with further talks on the cheetah in Algeria, giraffes and vultures in Niger, a rare lizard in Mauritania, and the herpetofauna of Algeria, ostriches in Morocco and Niger, and very welcome – the Tassili cypress in Algeria.

It was a very full and entertaining programme that also included a keenly anticipated and well-attended workshop on the dama gazelle, run by David Mallon of the IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group.

Was the SSIG meeting a success? A quick survey in the week after the meeting yielded 60 responses of which 92% said they were very or more than satisfied with the online event. The survey also yielded may other observations on the themes, structure, and content, with fine suggestions for the future. Overall, there was great approval and enthusiasm for the meeting.

A registration of 180, with a maximum recorded of 120 persons online during day one must count as a significant upgrading for SSIG! We have been invited to meet in 2022 in Almeria, Spain. Perhaps we should consider a hybrid meeting that is both face-to-face but also allows remote participation.

SCF wishes to continue to use the SSIG family to help it pursue its strategic objective of championing conservation in the Sahel and Sahara. We are grateful to everyone who joined in the meeting, for their support and future help in promoting the urgent and massive needs for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the region.

BY  
Mark Stanley Price  
CONSERVATION  
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BOARD MEMBER  
SAHARA  
CONSERVATION FUND





## Ten Days in Termit

# Extracts from my journal. Termit & Tin Toumma (Niger) 6-15 December 2009

These pages present photos taken on a fieldtrip carried out in Niger during 10 days in December 2009. Tim Wachter, senior conservation biologist with the Zoological Society of London, Thomas Rabeil, program officer with the Sahara Conservation Fund, and I carried out a fieldtrip to the Termit mountains and neighbouring Tin Toumma desert in Eastern Niger. We were accompanied by a small team of Nigerien colleagues, most of whom were based in the region. At the time, the area we visited was being proposed for gazettelement as a new and vast desert conservation area. This was subsequently achieved in 2012, when the 97,000km<sup>2</sup> Termit & Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve was established by the Niger Government.

In 2019, under pressure from the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation, the Niger Government degazetted more than 50% of the reserve, leaving the entire Tin Toumma desert portion and the prime habitat of the world's last viable population of addax unprotected. To compensate for this, a similar sized block of land was included in the reserve to the west of the Termit Massif.

The new part has none of the values of Tin Toumma and is highly degraded in parts. In January 2021, a new decree

was issued finalizing the new reserve boundaries.

Currently, there are almost certainly less than fifty addax left in the wild.

SCF encourages you to read the full report of this mission, a fascinating text, here : <https://saharaconservation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Newby-Ten-Days-In-Termit.pdf>



BY  
John Newby  
SENIOR ADVISER  
SAHARA CONSERVATION  
FUND



Photos © John Newby

Photos: Left page: Rich desert pasture of annual plants

Page from right, left to right and top to bottom: Spurred tortoise / Sand cat keeping a low profile / The renowned well of Kizini / Fruits and stems of Capparis decidua / Addax tracks in Tin Toumma / Lappet-faced vulture





Photos © Département des Eaux et Forêts, Maroc



## Addax Reintroduction Program

# Update on Addax reintroductions

UNFORTUNATELY, SINCE NOW TOO LONG THE ADDAX IS CONSIDERED THE MOST THREATENED UNGULATE IN AFRICA, WITH POSSIBLY LESS THAN 100 INDIVIDUALS LEFT IN THE WILD IN NIGER AND CHAD. LUCKILY, IN 2019 TWO INITIATIVES, ONE TO THE NORTH OF THE SAHARA AND THE OTHER TO THE SOUTH, BUT WITH A COMMON PARTNER – THE SAHARA CONSERVATION FUND (SCF) – IS PUTTING WORDS INTO ACTION TO STOP THE ADDAX BECOMING THE NEXT SPECIES TO BE DECLARED EXTINCT IN THE WILD.

The release into the wild of 32 addax in Morocco in late November 2019 was a world first. The animals, successfully translocated from Souss Massa National Park (SMNP), took an 18-hour journey from west to east to reach the M'hamid El-Ghizlane Reserve (in south-eastern Morocco). Fortunately for the addax, the Covid-19 pandemic did not stop the work of the Moroccan Water and Forest Department officials and a second group of 20 animals was released in late 2020. Collaboration of SCF and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute consists of providing GPS satellite (Iridium) collars for 10 addax and developing a customized tracking protocol the local team will implement after the release.

Following a first, hard dry season, when urgent supplementary feeding was provided to help the animals, the addax are adapting to their new environment, with both released groups now forming just one and exploring an area of between 2000 and 4000 ha. In total, Morocco has now released 52 addax into their historical range in the country and three new born calves have been added to the count. In total, 11 adults and 9 calves born in the reserve have died from different causes. Later this year, another 20-30 addax from SMNP will follow the same journey to the south-east.

Almost at the same time the addax were released on the northern fringes of the Sahara desert in Morocco, a group of 15 addax born in captivity in Abu Dhabi were landing on the southern edge of the Sahara, in central Chad. After more than 40 years' absence, this first group of addax was reintroduced into the Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve (OROAGR) in January 2020. A second group of 25 addax landed in Chad in February 2020 just before the pandemic paralyzed further air travel. They were released in September 2020.

As in Morocco, the addax released in January were occasionally supported with fodder through the late dry season. The second group released after the rainy season did not require support. At the time of writing, 8 deaths and 24 births have been registered in OROAGR following the release of 40 addax. Thanks to the great work carried out by the field monitoring team, with close guidance and

support from the Zoological Society of London, we know today that the addax population grew by c. 25% in the first 12 months for the firstly released group! By June 2021, there are 56 addax in OROAGR, based on good resighting rates of tagged adults and calves.

There are few animals so iconic in the Saharan desert than the addax and at the same time so much in need of urgent conservation action. This unique ungulate is at the heart of SCF's history and mission. The challenge is enormous but through solid collaboration between organizations, governments, and other stakeholders, we can still rebuild a free-living addax population to wander in healthy numbers across their vast historical range.

\*Thank you to Tim Wachter, John Newby, Zouhair Amhaouch and Latifa Sikli for their input and contributions.

*Taronga Conservation Society Australia and Erlebnis-Zoo Hannover kindly partnered with SCF for the collaring and monitoring of the addax reintroduced in Morocco.*

*The reintroduction of addax in Chad is carried out within the framework of the Scimitar-horned Oryx Reintroduction Programme launched in 2016 as joint initiative of the Government of Chad and the Environment Agency–Abu Dhabi. Under the overall leadership and management of the Environment Agency–Abu Dhabi, on-the-ground implementation is carried out by the Sahara Conservation Fund. Phase II of the project started in 2019; it maintains focus on building the oryx population but also adds new Sahelo-Saharan species to the mix, including the Critically Endangered addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), dama gazelle (*Nanger dama*), and North African ostrich (*Struthio camelus camelus*). Generous support for the collaring and monitoring of reintroduced addax is provided by Saint Louis Zoo.*

BY  
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PROGRAM MANAGER  
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# How you can help

Until very recently, the silent crisis of extinction in the Sahara and the Sahel has been largely overlooked and underfunded by the international conservation community and aid agencies around the world. In 2004, a small group of committed individuals and institutions launched the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF) in response to an urgent call to action: “If not us, then who will speak for Saharan wildlife?”

SCF is now leading a rapidly growing Sahelo-Saharan wildlife conservation movement to protect and restore a unique and exquisitely adapted assemblage of species, including addax, scimitar-

horned oryx, Saharan cheetah, North African ostrich and dama gazelles.

As a fully registered NGO in the U.S and France, SCF relies on donations, grants and other funding from individuals, corporations and organizations to help drive its mission and to give voice to the Sahara and the plight of its wildlife.

We invite you to add your voice to the growing chorus calling for the protection and restoration of Sahelo-Saharan wildlife through your support of SCF.

TO DONATE TO SCF JUST SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT :  
[WWW.SAHARACONSERVATION.ORG/DONATE](http://WWW.SAHARACONSERVATION.ORG/DONATE)



[www.saharaconservation.org](http://www.saharaconservation.org) | [comms@saharaconservation.org](mailto:comms@saharaconservation.org)

If you would like to know more about our work and how to contribute to our projects, please do not hesitate to contact us. We would love to hear from you!

Facebook : @SaharaCF

Twitter : @Sahara\_CF

Youtube : Sahara Conservation Fund

SCF is grateful to John Newby, Latifa Sikli, Zouhair Amhaouch, Mark Stanley Price, Tim Wachter, Violeta Barrios, for their photos and contributions to this issue. Sandscript is edited by SCF. You can contact [comms@saharaconservation.org](mailto:comms@saharaconservation.org) with any comments and feedback. We also would like to thank the growing chorus of partners that gives us the precious support that makes our projects and their achievements so tangible.



Photos © John Newby



# SAND SCRIPT

The biannual publication of the Sahara Conservation

Launched in 2007, Sandscript has been bringing you news of the Sahara Conservation Fund and its projects for over a decade. Since its inception, Sandscript articles have been written by the SCF team, their collaborators, and all those who, through their fieldwork, make the conservation of biodiversity a reality. Its primary purpose is to inform the public of our conservation activities in the Sahara and Sahel, to share relevant news items, but also to sensitize the reader to the beauty and richness of this region of the world. Over the years, Sandscript has gone beyond a simple informative role to provide original perspectives on poorly-known areas of Africa and their amazingly diverse, unique and threatened wildlife. It is thanks to its narrative style and its beautiful photos that the publication invites the reader, twice a year, to delve into this universe. Taking readers behind the scenes, Sandscript creates a new perspective on the fauna and flora of the Sahara and the Sahel and the efforts undertaken to ensure its survival.

We are sincerely grateful to all those who have helped make Sandscript one of the first and finest sources of information on the unique but neglected wildlife of the Sahara and the Sahel.

To accompany and complement Sandscript with brief news items, an e-newsletter is also available. Subscribe online at [www.saharaconservation.org](http://www.saharaconservation.org).



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

