



Sandscript

Number 12 Fall 2012



The sandy boots brigade

Over my long career as a conservationist I have often been asked how on earth we can possibly succeed in our mission to save wildlife against such horrendous and seemingly insurmountable odds. Not an easy one that, I say, desperately searching for the exit. Seriously, though, answers have to be found but there is no doubt there are very few handy “off the peg” solutions. Each situation, each place, each context has its own specificity calling for an infinite number of tailor-made responses. Our article on the slaughter of wildlife in North Africa is just one obvious example. How do we protect wildlife during war and upheaval?

One could take the high road and espouse a long-term view based on establishing a “new world order” in which equal-

ty, honesty, justice, sustainable use, wisdom, etc. are prime but I just don't see that happening anytime soon and in the meantime endangered species come ever closer to that precipitous decline towards extinction. For some like the scimitar-horned oryx that has already happened in the wild but as our articles on Chad and Tunisia demonstrate, solutions can be found.

Being the son of a farm labourer, brought up in rural England, my view of things tends to be more down to earth and practical in nature. And as every conservationist knows, success has its origins in a mixture of many ingredients — innovation, incentives, knowledge, resources, etc. — but chief amongst these to my mind is the human factor and

the ability to mobilize and support dedicated people at all levels. After all, improvement depends on changing human behaviour for the most part.

To SCF, focussing as it does on field-based conservation of threatened wildlife, nowhere is the human factor more important than in the field itself. Our partners, the rangers, game guards, community leaders, local activists, etc. are at the coalface of our mission and it is our duty to support them as best we can in what is often perilous work, calling for enormous dedication and where persecution and even loss of life in the course of duty is not uncommon.

Please enjoy this issue of *Sandscript* — your support makes all the difference.

In this issue:

Sandy boots	1
Chad oryx	2
Tunisian oryx	3
Wildlife slaughter	4
Cheeky monkeys	5
SSIG 2013	6



Improved rainfall in the Sabel this year should result in good pasture for dorcas gazelles, like these two calves pictured above, and other desert species.



There can be no doubt the addax of Termit and Tin Toumma in Niger would be in far worse shape today was it not for the efforts of the dedicated rangers, research staff and community game guards that by their work and active presence in the field demonstrate tangibly to one and all that they care and that the addax is a natural treasure to be cared for and cherished for ever.

(Photo: Thomas Rabeil/ SCF)



Scimitar-horned oryx could soon be back in their old stamping grounds in Chad (Photo: Olivier Born)

Oryx get presidential go ahead

As SCF's logo, the scimitar-horned oryx represents the threats that face desert wildlife but also the hope that one day this magnificent animal will once again roam free on African soil. Once abundant on the vast, dry, sub-Saharan grasslands, the oryx fell prey to a lethal combination of overhunting, drought and habitat loss. Thankfully, significant numbers of oryx exist in collections across the world and efforts to restore the species to the wild are underway in several countries.

Up until the late 1970s, the oryx prospered in Chad's Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve, one of the world's largest protected areas. Regrettably, the oryx became extinct during the 1980s largely as a result of civil war in that country. Recent surveys, however, carried out by SCF and Chad's National Parks and Wildlife Service have underlined the reserve's enormous potential to host a successful oryx reintroduction project. There is abundant habitat and space to cater for the oryx's needs and initial contacts with the local author-

ities and the reserve's inhabitants have been very encouraging.

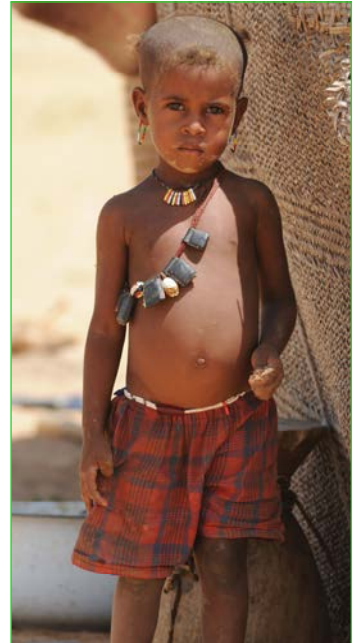
In May this year, SCF organized a major stakeholder workshop in the Chadian capital of N'Djaména. Facilitated by IUCN's Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, the workshop and fieldtrip that preceded it brought together around 50 people from diverse interest groups, including local politicians and representatives from the reserve's herders associations.

The results were extremely positive, paving the way for detailed project development to take place. The project not only has the strong backing of Chad's environment ministry but also the Head of State himself, Mr Idriss Deby Itno (right). A keen conservationist, Mr Deby has warmly welcomed the initiative, promising his personal support and that of his government.

Over the coming months, SCF and its partners will work closely with the Chadian authorities to develop a full proposal combining oryx reintroduction with protected area

management. Starting from a core protection zone of several thousand square kilometres, oryx will hopefully be brought in, acclimatized, released and monitored. Over time, further animals will be released and secondary sites developed to create a network of recovery points within the reserve. Partnerships will be developed with the local communities and agencies active in the area's development to ensure that win-win solutions can be found in developing the reserve's space and resources for the mutual benefit of both people and wildlife.

This project is one of the most ambitious ever undertaken by SCF and we thank the following organizations for their precious support and counsel: Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi, Addax & Oryx Foundation, Al Ain Zoo, Convention on Migratory Species, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, IUCN CBSG, Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, St. Louis Zoo, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, and the Zoological Society of London.





A superb herd of fit scimitar-horned oryx graces Tunisia's Dghoumes National Park (Photo: Marie Petretto/Marwell Wildlife)

Hope for Tunisia's oryx and addax

With the aftermath of the Arab Spring still being played out in front of the world's media, conservation work away from the spotlights is helping Tunisia restore its once vibrant large mammal fauna. Almost 50 years since Tunisia's Forest Law laid down the basis for wildlife conservation in the country, the results are on the whole positive. Many desert species, like the dorcas gazelle and the North African ostrich, enjoy the relative safety of the semi-wild in restored habitats inside a significant network of protected areas. However, the most striking success is probably the return of the large antelopes, the scimitar-horned oryx (above) and addax (right), that existed in large herds but are now considered Extinct in the Wild and Critically Endangered by IUCN respectively.

The reintroduction of antelopes into a network of relatively small, fenced protected areas poses particular challenges because of inherent risks to small isolated populations. Hence, in collaboration with SCF, Marwell Wildlife is

starting a 2-year project to assess the impact of increasing numbers of oryx on their habitat and the effects of limited space on the performance of the population in Dghoumes National Park. The results will help inform management of the species, and create a practicable monitoring system that could be applied more widely.

It is now 27 years since the first group of scimitar-horned oryx was brought back to Tunisia from UK zoos. Several other imports have occurred since then and there are now about 180 individuals in four protected areas (Bou Hedma, Sidi Toui, Oued Dekouk and Dghoumes). Forthcoming fieldwork will include DNA analyses to evaluate the impact of current management on genetic diversity, and help design a national meta-population plan, including translocations of animals between protected areas and augmentation with new animals from breeding programs in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the herd of addax that was reintroduced to

Djebil National Park in 2007 with support from SCF is doing well. During the coming months, births will be monitored so that calves can be identified and selected for future translocation to Senghar National Park to help achieve long term goals for the restoration of this species in the Grand Erg Oriental.

While there is hope for the reintroduction of the oryx and the conservation of remaining addax populations elsewhere in North Africa, Tunisia must take great credit for over a quarter of a century of efforts to re-establish these species within their network of protected areas. This meta-population model needs refinement but may be the only option for many former range states if they want to see the return of these magnificent antelope. SCF and its partners, including Marwell, will continue to play a central role in these endeavors at all scales.

This article was kindly contributed by Marie Petretto (right), Tunisia-based Conservation Officer with Marwell Wildlife.





Top: Photos revealing slaughter of dorcas and presence of Arabian sand gazelles imported into Libya; Bottom: slender-horned gazelles killed in southern Tunisia

Massive wildlife slaughter

Thanks to new technologies, the ubiquitous cell phone with built-in camera, and the power of the Internet and social networks, like Facebook, to disseminate information, new facts are coming to light on the impacts of the Arab Spring on North African wildlife. Thanks to our colleagues in Tunisia, Algeria and Libya, hundreds of photos showing the goriest scenes of wildlife slaughter are now available. Species hardest hit are the slender-horned and dorcas gazelles and the Barbary sheep, all listed as threatened and restricted to a tiny number of sites. While much of the damage probably took place during the revolutions that toppled the former leaders of Tunisia and Libya, there is good evidence for contin-

ued poaching, especially in the deserts of southern Tunisia. Here, as elsewhere in the Sahara, the new weapons of choice are the motorbike and the quad. Capable of chasing down and exhausting wildlife over the difficult terrain, the motorbike is rapidly becoming the number one scourge of gazelles in even quite isolated places.

The growing number of North African NGOs and conservationists are well aware of these problems and are taking action locally but they desperately need our help and backing in what can often be for them a very perilous undertaking. Support from the international conservation community is urgently required, including from influential inter-governmental or-

ganizations like the Convention on Migratory Species and IUCN. Over the coming months, SCF will be working to expose the gravity of the situation facing North Africa's desert wildlife and helping mobilize support for high level contacts with the authorities concerned.

Civil war in Chad in the 1980s drove the scimitar-horned oryx to extinction in the wild. In Niger, it was the ostrich that suffered the consequences of the uprising of the 1990s. Conservation of wildlife should not be about regime change or civil unrest but about ensuring the priceless natural heritage of all countries remains safe for future generations to cherish and enjoy.





Left: patas monkeys with dark chanting goshawk; Right: patas monkeys with hooded vulture (Photos: SCF)

Cheeky little monkeys

In the blink of an eye it was over the fence, across the pen and into the feeding bowl. Quickly swelled by new arrivals, the animated little group of ginger-red patas monkeys was soon scoffing its daily ration of stolen ostrich food. The water bucket was next and as usual it was soon on its side. Ever the opportunists, how can one blame the monkeys for making the most of this sudden bonanza of food and water?

Thanks in very large part to the support raised through the SCF Adopt-an-Ostrich campaign, the ostriches at the Kellé breeding center in eastern Niger are well housed, well fed and well looked after by a staff of three, including site manag-

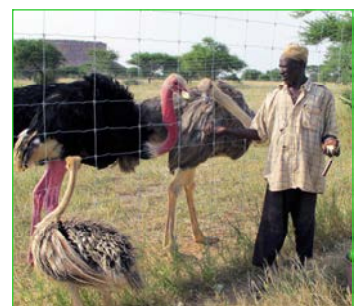
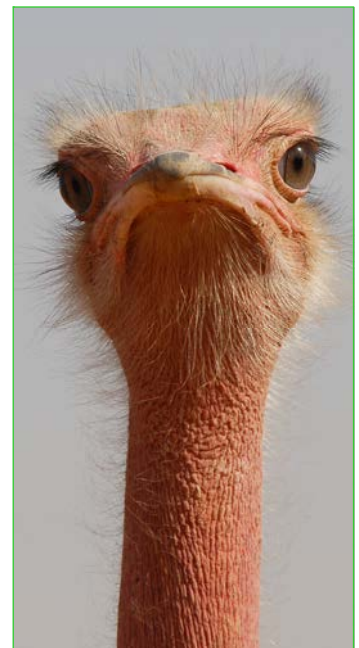
er Amadou and ostrich keepers Lawali and Ousseini. Of late, however, they have had their hands full dealing with the increasing number of monkeys that have found the diner.

To assess the scope of the problem a camera was set up at one feeding station. Not only were patas monkeys recorded but a large variety of other visitors, including ground squirrels, pale foxes, ravens, crows and hooded vultures. And while the monkeys are the major culprits when it comes to theft of food, the crows and ravens have already been seen attacking and killing a new-born ostrich chick.

To keep the monkeys out

we will put up an electric hot-wire along the top of the fences similar to that used for domestic livestock.

This is being made possible as part of another exciting development at the site to install solar power. The technical side is being lead by Wildlife Conservation Network's Stephen Gold and his team. When up and running, solar power will provide energy for lighting, incubator, hatcher, computers and staff housing, including a small education center where we can welcome local school groups to see the birds and to learn about conservation. None of this, however, would be possible without your generous support.



A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL OUR ADOPT-AN-OSTRICH DONORS

Audubon Nature Institute, Busch Gardens, Columbus Zoo & Aquarium, Dallas Zoo AAZK, Dickerson Park Zoo, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, Fresno's Chaffee Zoo, Lion Country Safari AAZK, Marwell Wildlife, Milwaukee County Zoo, North Carolina Zoo, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, Phoenix Zoo, Sacramento Zoo, Safari West, San Diego Zoo Global, San Francisco Zoo, Saint Louis Zoo, West Texas AAZK, Woodland Park Zoo, Zoo Atlanta, Zoo New England.

Sandscript is the twice-yearly newsletter of SCF, the **Sahara Conservation Fund**.

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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 at scf@saharaconservation.org We would love to hear from you!

SSIG 2013 is in Morocco — Save the date!



This year, the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group (SSIG) was hosted by the Zoological Society of London at London Zoo. Some 50 participants attended. In 2013, SSIG will meet in Agadir, Morocco, by kind invitation of the High Commission for Water and Forests. Watch the SCF website for confirmation of the May 1-5 dates, registration papers and agenda.