



# Sandscript

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## Niger decrees Termit reserve

On March 6 this year, the Niger Government officially established the Termit & Tin Toumma National Nature and Cultural Reserve. At 97,000 km<sup>2</sup> (37,450 sq. ml), or approximately the same size as Hungary or the US State of Indiana, the reserve is the largest single protected area in Africa. In one bold move, Niger has seen its protected areas estate rise from a respectable 6.5% to a remarkable 14%, and in doing so achieving the recommendation of the United Nations Millennium Goals for Development.

The reserve will give vital protection to some of the world's most endangered species, including the addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), the dama gazelle (*Nanger dama*), the Barbary sheep

(*Ammotragus lervia*) and the Saharan cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), as well as numerous reptiles, other mammals, and birds, such as threatened vultures and bustards.

The idea of establishing a reserve at Termit has been around for many years but it took the impetus of the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group (SSIG) and SCF, to develop a viable concept. Luckily, this coincided with the presence of a visionary program to conserve Sahelo-Saharan antelopes developed by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and funded by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and more latterly, the European Union.

Day-to-day, the real driving force behind the reserve's creation was the team of locally-based Nigerien and expatriate staff, lead by Ibrahim Bello and Thomas Rabeil (photo below). Together with the local authorities, ministry officials and community leaders, the team worked tirelessly to provide decision-makers with a viable, well-researched and thoroughly convincing proposal, while at the same time lobbying for support and communicating Termit and Tin Toumma's unique values to both national and international audiences.

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Lappet-faced (top) and hooded (bottom) vultures are both threatened by trade in body parts for charms and juju in West African markets.



SCF's Thomas Rabeil briefs the President of Niger, His Excellency M. Mahamadou Issoufou, on the Termit & Tin Toumma nature reserve during a recent presentation in Niamey on the country's biodiversity.



*The austere and timeless beauty of the Termit & Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve (Photo: John Newby/SCF)*

## Termit (cont.)

Local stakeholders have also been heavily involved in the process, including pastoralists and their community leaders living in the area, who see the reserve's establishment and successful management as a way to secure their way of life and the natural resources on which they depend.

Over the past six years, the Sahara Conservation Fund has injected over \$325000 (€250000) into the project, including funds for ecological survey and monitoring, wildlife protection, training, research on endangered species, salaries and general running costs, communications, fund-

raising and support for humanitarian work amongst the local population (see box below).

The battle to create the reserve may be won but the war against illegal hunting of addax, gazelles and bustards must still continue. The newly established reserve is a major asset in this fight but it will only be as effective as the resources and commitment fed into its management. Since the arrival of petroleum workers and their military guardians in Tin Toumma, hunting incidents have increased enormously and are likely to carry on doing so

unless extremely firm measures are taken to counter them.

As Steve Monfort, SCF's Chair and avid fan of Termit Tin Toumma so aptly notes: *"The establishment of the Termit & Tin Toumma reserve is a major achievement by any standards. Marking the successful conclusion of one episode, it also heralds the beginning of a new chapter for endangered desert wildlife in which continued support from all players will be needed to help the reserve meet its objectives to conserve Niger's precious natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations."*



**SCF would like to warmly thank all its partners for their most generous support and for making the establishment of the Termit & Tin Toumma reserve such a superb reality:**

Abilene Zoo, Adam Eyres, Addax & Oryx Foundation, AZA Conservation Endowment Fund, Convention on Migratory Species, Buffalo Zoo, Calgary Zoo, Disney's Animal Kingdom, Erie Zoo, European Union, Exotic Endeavors, Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Fresno Chaffee Zoo, Gilman International Conservation, Lynn Hall, Marwell Wildlife, Milwaukee Zoo, Nigerien Ministry of Environment, Nashville Zoo, New England Zoo, Oregon Zoo, Osnabruck Zoo, Philadelphia Zoo, Phyllis Frazier, Planète Sauvage, Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences, San Diego Global, Saint Louis Zoo, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Sheri Hanna, Smithsonian's National Zoo, Steadfast UK, The Living Desert, Oxford University WildCRU, Wildlife World Zoo, Zoo d'Amnéville, Zoo Praha and the Zoological Society of London.





*A fine herd of slender-horned gazelles in the Sidi Toui National Park in Tunisia (Photo: Tim Wacher)*

## *Ghost of the sands*

In recent times, the Sahara Conservation Fund, the Zoological Society of London, and the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group have participated in surveys of the slender-horned gazelle (IUCN 'Endangered') in Algeria and Tunisia. Reconnaissance visits to the Algerian Erg Occidental and Erg Oriental were interspersed with camel-based surveys of the Tunisian sector of the Erg Oriental at Djebil, and most recently the Jabbes-Senghar National Park. The news about this poorly known and very striking gazelle is mixed. Like ghosts of the sands, the *reem* as they are known in Arabic, are always elusive and difficult to see. In spite of this, our local Tunisian partners stress that almost everywhere the gazelles suffer from uncontrolled hunting, irrespective of their protected status. Nonetheless, it is also true that, without fail, on fieldtrips to the margins of the great sand seas, fresh gazelle tracks have proved relatively easy to find. The circumstances prompt key questions.

First, are we identifying these tracks correctly and not con-

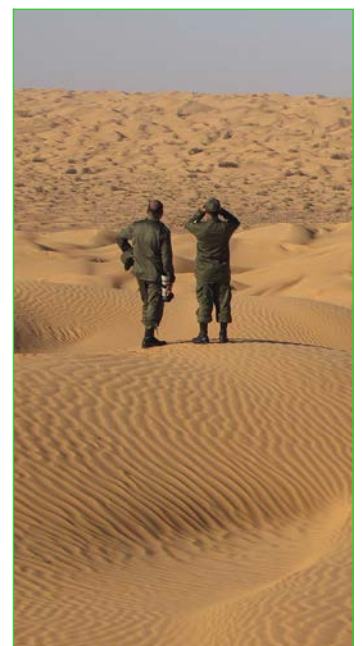
fusing them with the more widespread dorcas gazelle, which is also present at the edge of the ergs, though apparently less so in the interiors? And second, how can we find out what these observations mean in terms of numbers of gazelle? The great difficulty with the second question is that the tumbling dune landscape favoured by well-camouflaged and very shy slender-horned gazelles, while offering memorable desert scenery, provides an almost impossible terrain for conventional ground-based survey methods, such as those we have used for dorcas gazelles in the far less sandy habitats of the Sahel. Perhaps the best option to establish numbers will be to conduct helicopter-based surveys.

In the meantime, however, we are making good progress with track interpretation. Slender-horned tracks are generally reckoned to be significantly larger than those of the dorcas gazelle, but until recently we had little or no solid data on how much larger and particularly on what degree of overlap might occur between the

two species. To answer this question we are measuring footprints from known captive adult animals on similar substrate at the Sidi Toui National Park. The results show average hoof print size could be considered diagnostic in 14 out of 17 individuals measured, with one large dorcas and two smaller slender-horned gazelles falling in a zone of overlap and uncertainty. The study provides useful reassurance that for the most part we have not been confusing tracks of the two species. Since the tracks indicate that slender-horned gazelles are well distributed, if not common, this also confirms the value of attempting a helicopter survey to try and answer the bigger question of how many gazelles might be out there.

The full results of this study can be downloaded from our website on the [Reports](#) pages.

*The author of this article, Dr Tim Wacher, is a Senior Conservation Biologist with the Zoological Society of London.*





Part of Abu Dhabi's magnificent captive population of Scimitar-horned Oryx (Photo: John Newby/SCF)

## Poised for re-entry

The last wild scimitar-horned oryx probably died sometime in the early 1990s in the vast, open, sub-Saharan grasslands of Chad or Niger. The species' disappearance mirrors to a very large extent the colonization of its prairie rangelands by human beings and the growing impact of technology, changing land-use and climate change.

The oryx was once abundant across its Sahelian habitat, from the Atlantic coast in the west to the Nile Valley in the east. For lack of accessible water for many months of the year, the area was only lightly occupied by nomadic herders. And while the oryx has always been a target of choice for traditional hunters, the odds were always in the antelope's favor until modern firearms and off-road vehicles made their appearance, first in North Africa, where the oryx became extinct by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, and then more gradually south of the Sahara. Coupled with periodic drought, changing land-use patterns, habitat loss and civil strife, hunting has had a catastrophic impact on the oryx and many of the other species, like the addax and dama gazelle, with which it shares the Sahel and Sahara.

Up until its extinction in the wild, central Chad was the oryx's last major stronghold, with a population of at least 5000 animals occupying the Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim Game Reserve, an Indiana-sized piece of sub-desert rangeland established in the 1960s specifically for the species' protection. Migratory in behavior, it was possible to witness massed herds of oryx numbering over a thousand when gathered in undisturbed areas of fresh grazing. Civil war in Chad in the early 1980s put paid to all that but luckily a number of oryx had previously been captured and dispersed amongst zoos to form the basis of what is today the quite substantial oryx populations held in captivity in formal breeding programs and private collections.

Since 2009, SCF has been spearheading efforts to develop a strategy for the restoration of the oryx. This has included range state and expert meetings, as well as two major ground surveys carried out by SCF and its partners, Chad's Wildlife Department and the Zoological Society of London, in the framework of our Pan Sahara Wildlife Survey. Currently, we are working

closely with Chad's Environment Ministry and the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi (EAD) and other players to develop a project to reintroduce oryx back to the Ouadi Rimé reserve. In the coming weeks we will be carrying out further fieldwork and holding high level meetings in Chad to forward this initiative and to set out a timetable for the project's implementation. Both Chad and the reserve offer a very significant but increasingly rare opportunity to restore this magnificent animal back to its native habitat.

We would like to thank the following organizations for their generous support in this truly ambitious project: St Louis Zoo, Addax & Oryx Foundation, Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Al Ain Zoo, Convention on Migratory Species, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, and the Antelope, Reintroduction, and Conservation Breeding Specialist Groups of IUCN.





The success of our conservation work will depend largely on school children like these from the Zinder region of Niger (Photo: Dylan Burruss)

## Help feed a hungry friend

You will no doubt have heard the Sahel region of Africa has yet again been hit with erratic and inadequate rainfall. This has led to failed harvests and poorly developed grazing. An estimated 13 million people are affected with over 6 million of these in Niger alone. Here, food shortages are estimated to be in the order of 800,000 metric tonnes. As food runs out prices soar beyond the reach of the chronically poor. In the regions in which SCF works, those of Agadez, Zinder and Diffa, several thousand children are already suffering from severe malnutrition and deaths are being recorded on a daily basis. Under the best case scenario, the next harvest is at least 5 months away.

Lots of statistics, I know, but the reality is those statistics have names; names like Aysa, Mamadou and Bintou. Statistics that are hungry, statistics that hurt, statistics that cry. Statistics that struggle for breath and statistics that will die for want of food unless something is done about it.

And while the Niger government and the aid community

are doing their best to head off an even worse disaster there remains much to be done. We can help. With an initial donation of \$5,000 from St Louis Zoo, SCF has matched this with a further \$5,000. Our initial target now is to double this and send the funds to Niger to purchase food for severely malnourished children. SCF will partner with Save The Children to ensure that money gets used where it is most needed and most effective.

According to Justin Forsyth, Save The Children's chief executive, who has just returned from Niger, where some food is still available but not affordable. *"...we should urgently distribute small amounts of cash to the poorest families so that they can eat"*. He went on to say *"We need to pay particular attention to helping the under-fives, whose bodies succumb faster to lack of food. It costs less to stop children becoming malnourished than it does to bring them back from the brink of death—£.5 (\$8) supplements a child's diet for a month, compared with £80 (\$108) to treat a case of severe malnutrition."*

SCF is doing its very best to

implement an effective and responsible conservation program in Niger. And while we rightly focus our attention on endangered species, we never fail to recognize the importance of building meaningful and honest relationships with the people and communities whose support will ultimately decide the outcome of all our efforts. Beyond providing emergency food relief, we have a longer term program of support that includes health care and vaccinations against diseases like tetanus and measles, education and school canteens for the children of nomad families, and the provision of environmentally-sound and reliable sources of water.

Please help SCF reach our initial \$20,000 target and by doing so help a hungry friend. Donations can be made online via our secure [PayPal](#) link or by contacting our Treasurer, [Karen Sausman](#).

**STOP PRESS: \$20,000 target just reached thanks to a fabulous donation of \$10,000 from Larry and Tony Johnson. BLESS YOU GUYS!**



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

SCF is grateful to Thomas Rabeil, Kirk Duthler, Tim Wachter, Ashley Hughes, Dylan Burruss and John Newby for the information, articles and images used in this issue. Donations to our work can be made by [clicking here](#).



**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](mailto:scf@saharaconservation.org) We would love to hear from you!**

## Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund is a significant philanthropic endowment established to provide targeted grants to species conservation initiatives, to recognize leaders in the field of species conservation, and to elevate the importance of species on the broader conservation agenda. The Fund's reach in species conservation is truly global and its interest non-discriminatory.

The Fund is open to applications for funding support from conservationists based in all parts of the world, and will potentially support direct conservation projects focused on any and all kinds of endangered plant, animal and fungus species, subject to the approval of an independent evaluation committee. In addition, the fund will recognize leaders in the field of species conservation and scientific research to ensure their important work is given the attention

it deserves and to generally help elevate the importance of species in the global conservation discourse.

It is envisaged that the Fund's establishment will act as a catalyst to attract additional donations from third party sources to ensure that the Fund's annual contribution to direct species conservation initiatives increases over time.

Since its inception in 2009, the Fund has distributed \$7,195,000, with \$2,434,000 of this going to projects in Africa.

To date, the Sahara Conservation Fund has received three grants from the Fund totalling over \$60,000. This has been applied to the development of our scimitar-horned oryx conservation strategy and to research on the critically endangered dama gazelle through the provision of camera traps that are set in suitable dama habitat to record the gazelles' movements.

The fund is well and truly a godsend for species conservation.

