



Greening of the desert

It's a humbling experience to find oneself in the middle of a violent thunderstorm. Sobering, too, when you realise perched on top of a dune you are the tallest object for many miles around.

In spite of its legendary aridity, each year it does rain somewhere in the Sahara. And this year looks like it will be a good one, with reports of above average rainfall and excellent pasture coming in from across the region. This issue of *Sandscript* celebrates the all-too-brief wet season and the exuberant blooming of life that follows each down-pour.

In the 'boom or bust' world that often characterizes desert ecosystems, with years of drought followed abruptly by times of plenty, our page 5 article on the world's largest remaining addax population in Niger provides a sobering reality check on the natural and man-made challenges the addax faces in its fight for survival.

For desert people, too, the wet season brings brief but welcome respite from the merciless chore of drawing water from deep wells for

their livestock. Around short-lived seasonal pools, people can be seen herding their animals and enjoying a refreshing bathe, like the Obama-clad boy, pictured below, found recently in Chad splashing in a desert pool with his friends and a dozen or so migrant sandpipers and white storks.

Tim Wachter's article on the latest Pan Sahara Wildlife Survey to Chad also underlines the need to remain optimistic about saving critically endangered species like the dama gazelle. Numbers are desperately low but those gazelles are definitely hanging in there.

And hanging in is also what SCF is all about. We can and are making a difference in spite of tremendous odds.



And this thanks to our many loyal and generous sponsors and partners. Pages 3 and 4 pay tribute to their efforts and dedication to the cause of Saharan conservation.

With the season's very last rains now falling across the Sahel and the dunes alive with swaying grasses and the chirping of crickets and grasshoppers, it is a time for optimism and for action. Young gazelles and bustards will soon be seen following their parents and hopefully, deep in the desert, addax will also be having their calves. The elements have smiled favourably on the desert this year, can mankind do the same?

John Newby

Inside this issue:

Greening the Desert	1
Dama Gazelles	2
SCF Donors	3
SCF Donors	4
Addax	5
SCF Information	6
Desert All Stars	6



Moths and butterflies, caterpillars and crickets, grasshoppers and beetles all abound during the desert's brief wet season.





A remote camera captures two of Termit's precious dama gazelles (Photo: Project ASS/CMS/EU/FFEM/SCF)

Chad's dama gazelles surveyed

In August this year an SCF Pan Sahara Wildlife Survey team carried out a highly productive and exciting three week fieldtrip to western Chad. The mission, lead by Dr. Tim Wachter, was a return to one of the first areas surveyed by the fledgling SCF in 2001, and thus an important opportunity to see how rare Saharan wildlife had fared over the intervening years. As before, the mission was conducted in close partnership with Chad's Environment Ministry.

A key result in 2001 had been the confirmation of a small population of dama gazelle in the country's Manga region, north of Lake Chad. We now had a chance to find out if this population had persisted and in doing use new PSWS survey methods based on repeatable predetermined transect lines across suitable areas.

After several years of drought, the land was transformed by the abundant rainfall. Everywhere was bright green, with

trees in leaf, reflecting pools of water, and from time to time swiftly rolling banks of low, black cloud bringing sharp, dense showers.

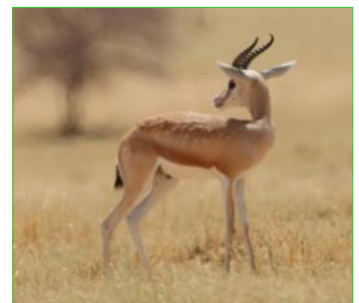
The impact on the local pastoralists was also evident, with many families on the move in spectacular caravans of live-stock, with signs of evident good cheer after many months of poor grazing.

Approaching our target zone, anticipation was high as we started to encounter the first dorcas gazelles, then Arabian and Nubian bustards. As we progressed, dorcas gazelles became more frequent. Encouragingly, large groups of vultures were also seen. With concern about West African vulture declines, this was very positive.

All the while we were passing places where we had met with dama gazelles nine years earlier. Local nomads confirmed that small numbers of 'grashi' (the Toubou name for dama gazelle) were still present. But we

were seeing no sign of them. And then suddenly, as we set out on the last two transects on a clear sunny morning, a single large male dama was spotted. He had been feeding not far from our route and remained in view a good while, as he crossed the dunes accompanied by a small group of dorcas gazelles. A tremendously exciting moment. We took pictures and searched for fresh dung pellets for genetic studies.

A couple of kilometers further on and a second dama sprang away. Stopping to scan a broad, green valley with binoculars we were stunned to discover eight more dama at rest. By the end of the last transect we had seen fifteen dama gazelles and enough dorcas to contemplate a full population estimate. Excellent results and further proof of the tremendous value of the survey work made possible by the support from HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for SCF's Pan Sahara Wildlife Survey project.





Rainfall, green grass and cooler temperatures bring the spurred tortoise out of its hot season burrows (Photo: Newby/SCF)



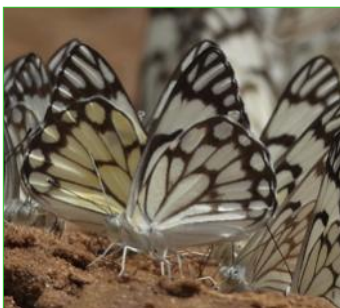
Thank you, merci beaucoup!

We deeply appreciate the generosity of the individuals and organizations that have helped SCF to become THE voice for conservation in the Sahara. We would not be able to pursue our mission without your dedication, loyalty and support. Together we have become a powerful chorus of voices speaking for the Sahara. We take this opportunity to offer a heartfelt Thank You to all those whose contributions from January 1, 2009 through August 31, 2010 were so vital to the success of SCF and its projects.



SCF Core Support

Addax Petroleum Foundation, Los Angeles Zoo Association, Safari Enterprises, Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort, Lynn Hall, Safari West, Smithsonian's National Zoological Park, Marwell Wildlife, Saint Louis Zoo, George & Diane Grettenberger, Nashville Zoo, San Diego Zoo, Harriet Robnett, Oklahoma City Zoo AAZK Chapter, Sedgwick County Zoo, Kyla Johnson, Rolling Hills Wildlife Adventure, Zoo Hannover, The Living Desert, Sacramento Zoo, Zoo Osnabrück



Scimitar-horned Oryx Recovery Workshops

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This wily and rarely seen sand cat takes cover behind a tussock of grass (Photo: Don Miller/SCF)

Game Fencing Katané Reserve (Senegal)

Exotic Wildlife Association, Kelley Bishop

Ostrich Recovery Project (Niger)

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A fine herd of reintroduced addax in their winter coats graces Tunisia's Jbil National Park (Photo: John Newby/SCF)

Niger's addax hit by drought & oil

The failure of the rains in 2009 was a disaster for many parts of the Sahel, with countries like Chad and Niger suffering major crises, widespread famine and loss of livestock.

Although highly adapted to cope with extremes of heat and aridity, desert wildlife, too, suffers when drought is severe and pastures poor in quality and quantity.

For the first time in several years our project team in Niger witnessed firsthand the impact of drought on Termit's addax, with several dead animals found (1). Addax still alive were dreadfully thin (2) and as such at greater risk from other impacts on their survival, such as the exploration and drill-

ing for oil in their Tin Toumma stronghold. The construction of drilling sites and the constant heavy vehicle traffic is keeping the addax out of many key areas of pasture. Already the indelible and totally inadmissible smudge of oil spills is polluting an environment that has remained pristine since its creation eons ago (3). On raising the issue with one person, I was told glibly that it didn't matter because it was only a desert!

Another significant impact of prolonged drought or poor grazing on desert ungulates is a reduction in breeding. Not only do pregnancies fall off but foetuses are aborted and even young calves abandoned. Luckily, these same gazelles and ante-

lopes seem capable of switching the reproductive process back on rapidly when conditions improve. We sincerely hope to see a bumper crop of young animals following this year's excellent rainfall. As we recently saw in Chad, not only has the rain brought on a major crop of annual plants but has also kick-started a new age class of perennials that will hopefully grow rapidly, establish themselves and prosper. Once well established, the tussock grasses and thorny shrubs will often last many years, providing addax and gazelles with food, moisture and even protection when big enough to provide shelter against the wind and sandstorms.



Sandscript is the twice-yearly newsletter of SCF, the Sahara Conservation Fund. It is written and edited by SCF Director, John Newby.

SCF is grateful to Amina Fellous, Don Miller, Tim Wachter, Elizabeth Mungall, Christian Noirard, Thomas Rabeil and Bill Houston for the articles and images used in this issue.



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!

Desert All Stars: Amina Fellous



A day in Algiers with Amina Fellous (above in orange) is a day to remember. An accomplished biologist with a broad range of interests in natural history, Amina is also an endless source of information on the fascinating history of Algeria and its imposing capital city, Algiers. From her office at the National Agency for Nature Conservation in the Hamma Botanical Gardens in downtown Algiers, Amina keeps her eye on a number of key initiatives to protect Algeria's biodiversity. A keen networker, she knows all the players and is constantly on

the lookout for opportunities to promote action. She is also a strong champion of the growing number of university students pursuing research on wildlife and conservation-related topics.

In an arena dominated by men, Amina commands the respect of all for her commitment to the cause and her willingness to demonstrate her ability to face gruelling field conditions in the pursuit of her job.

In her spare time Amina is engaged in a major research effort to study the endangered slender-horned and dorcas gazelle populations that

inhabit the vast Great Eastern Erg sand sea. Some of this work is being carried out in conjunction with SCF and its partners. Braving sandstorms on camelback to get the job done, Amina is pushing back the frontiers of modern day conservation in Algeria — an object lesson in leading by example.

