



Activity report– Semester 1, 2024

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# **Support the restoration of North African ostriches to the wild in Niger**

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# Information on the document

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**Date :** July 2024

This document provides **a summary of the main achievements over the last 6 months of the North African ostrich program** implemented by Sahara Conservation, in collaboration with local authorities in Niger.

Sahara Conservation and its partners have been supporting the conservation of the North African Ostrich in Niger for over a decade, to achieve the main goal of returning this emblematic species back into the wild in the country.

Activities were centered around the welfare of the ostriches, their reproduction and the management of the captive breeding group between the different sites and towards the Gadabeggi Biosphere Reserve, in south-central Niger, for reintroduction purposes.

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# What we aim to accomplish

## The context

The North African ostrich (*Struthio camelus camelus*) has faced a rapid decline over the past 50 years and is currently on the brink of extinction.

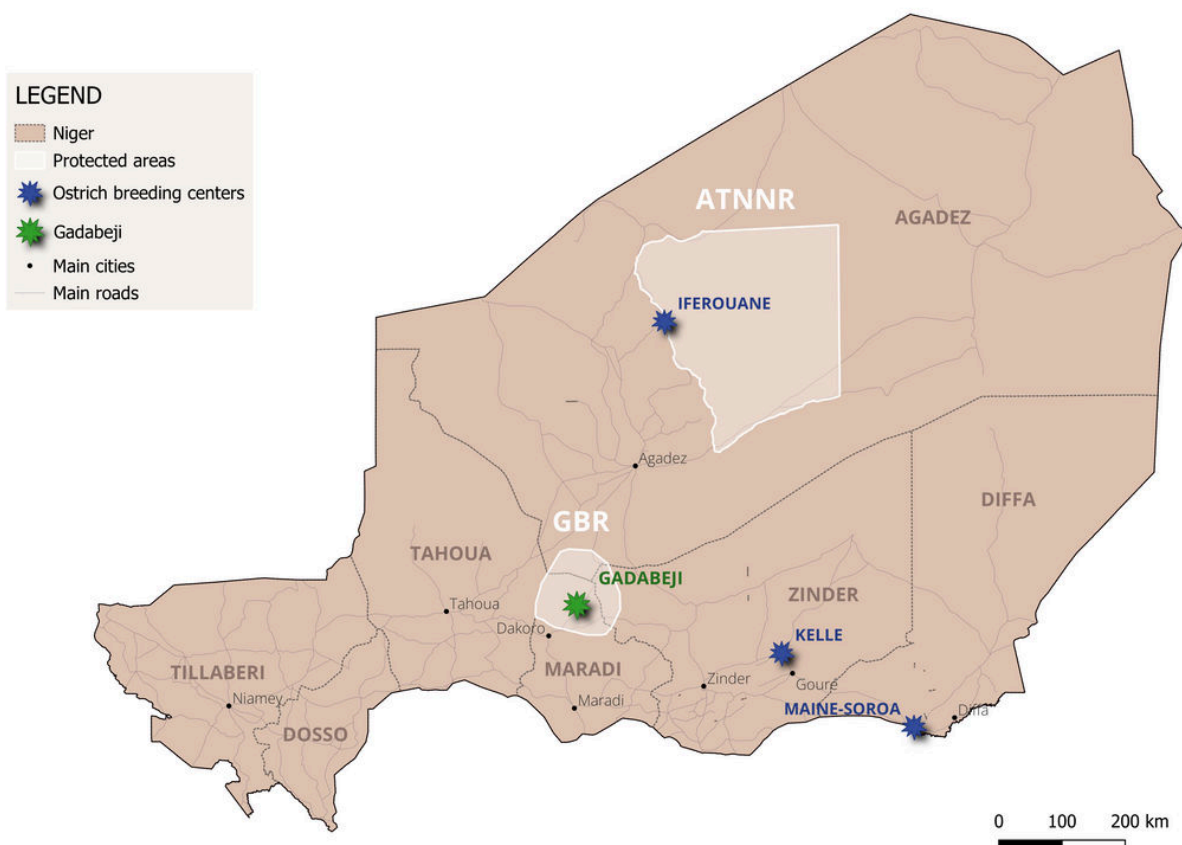
In Niger, the North African ostrich has disappeared from the wild since 2004. The species is fully protected by law in the country. A national strategy for the conservation of the North African ostrich was developed in 2016 and updated in 2022 to safeguard and conserve this bird with the help of captive breeding and in the framework of public-private partnerships.

The future of the North African ostrich in Niger lies on captive breeding and reintroduction programs. Currently, about 50 North African ostriches live in captivity in three breeding centers, managed by non-governmental organizations or private owners, namely the sites of Kellé, Mainé-Soroa and Iférouane.

## Our objectives

With dedication and motivation, Sahara Conservation and its partners have worked to improve in-country captive breeding of pure North African ostriches, as well as the genetic pool of captive animals, to produce enough birds for the reintroduction program.

Reintroduction activities have been initiated with transfers from the Kellé breeding center to the Gadabeji Biosphere Reserve (GBR), where the species used to be present until 1955.



# What we achieved

**52** ostriches supported and part of the captive breeding program

**2** captive breeding sites under Sahara Conservation's management

**6** monitoring missions realised on all sites

**10** eggs hatched with artificial incubation

**30%** chicks' survival from artificially incubated hatched eggs

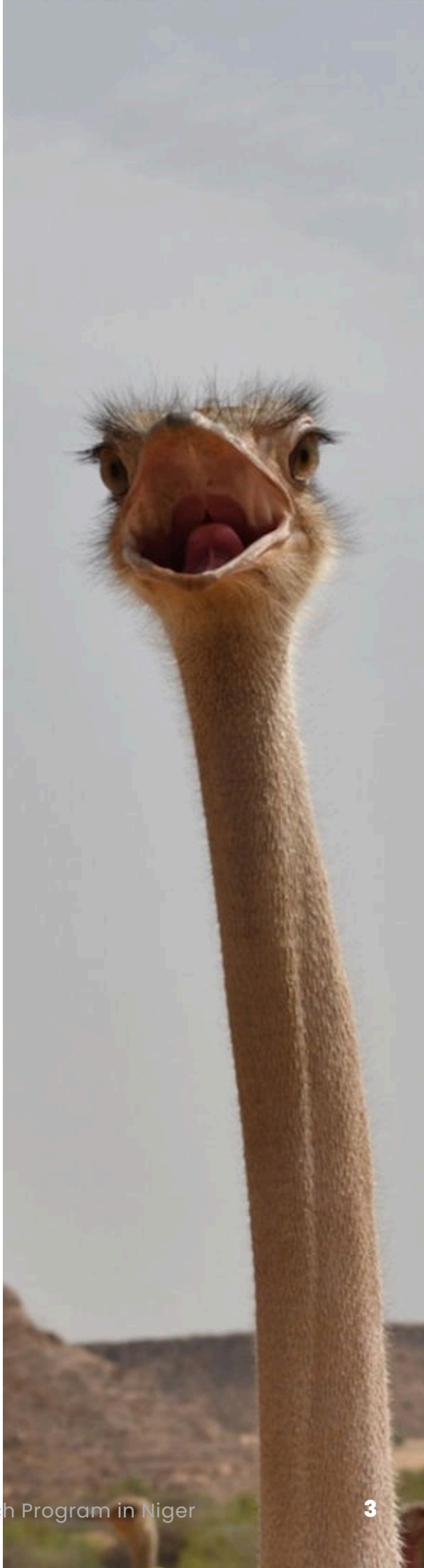
**3** successful transfers of a total of **6** chicks between 3 sites (Iférouane, Kellé, and GBR)

Over **10 000** people around the world heard about the program through our social media channels.

**258** visitors directly sensitized at the Kellé captive breeding centers

**1** presentation sharing our work at the international meeting of the Sahel & Sahara Interest Group

**1** Participation to the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria planning workshop





# Beyond the birds

## We encourage interest and collaboration

- **The site of Kellé, a local and a national pride:** Ostriches are considered as a national heritage in Niger, and Kellé's infrastructure are unique in the region. Locally, people are proud to have on their land the last North African Ostriches. The ostriches and the site itself contributed to the village renown beyond Niger's borders.
- **A growing impact on local communities:** as part of the program several initiatives are developed to benefit the surrounding communities, such as the orchard harvested by local women within Kellé breeding center facilities or the involvement of young people on maintenance tasks, providing income for their families.
- **An improved collaboration between sites managers,** and specifically with the site of Iférouane as the first transfers ever realized between Kellé and Iférouane took place this semester.



**Picture:** Arrival of 3 chicks successfully transferred from Kellé to Gadabeji Biosphere Reserve in central Niger. They were placed in a dedicated enclosure and will be closely monitored during the first months to ensure their survival.

*Date: April 2024*

## We work for the promotion and long-term sustainability of our action

- **The project's visibility and reach were enhanced** with dedicated communications through Sahara Conservation channels (social media, activity reports, etc.) and at events, improving its recognition among targeted public.
- **Our program activities and achievements were shared** to an international audience of over 80 participants at the Sahel & Sahara Interest Group (SSIG) meeting in Morocco.
- The participation of our field team to the SSIG meeting was the opportunity to **cultivate their enthusiasm** by sharing with fellow conservationists **strengthening the links with partners**.
- The opportunity to raise interest and pave the ground to **develop and encourage investment in the region** was enhanced.



**Picture:** Participants at the SSIG meeting in Agadir, Morocco, in May 2024. Sahara Conservation site manager attended the meeting and delivered a presentation on the project results to the 80 attendees.

**Date:** May 2024



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# Challenges

Raising North African Ostriches in remote areas of Niger comes with few challenges. Our team is devoted to the program, and its ongoing efforts enable us to understand the issues and find the most adapted solutions. The main challenges faced this semester were the following:

**The lack of reproductive behavior** was observed on both sites managed by Sahara Conservation. If it explains the low number of eggs and chicks obtained, the reasons behind such behavior remain unknown. The ostriches' distribution within the enclosures was changed as new reproductive groups were formed. We are now waiting for the next breeding period and ostriches will continue to be closely monitored.

**Ongoing maintenance** of the sites and their infrastructures is required. One of the biggest issues faced is silting of enclosures as sand builds up against the screens, reducing their effective heights. Sand is therefore regularly removed, creating opportunities and punctual incomes for local communities helping with the work.

**The herd size has remained stable** despite a high mortality, which counterbalances the obtention of new chicks. 4 individuals were lost in Kellé and Mainé, including Julien the oldest male in Kellé (25 years old) and Nani the oldest female in Mainé (14 years old). If young ostriches are particularly fragile, it is less common to face adult mortality. The causes are diverse and do not point to specific issues. Our team on site will continue its efforts to take the best care of the ostriches.

Despite **the political and socio-economic changes following last year Coup**, Sahara Conservation appreciates the importance of continuing and supporting conservation actions in Niger, on the ground, and is committed to continuing its work plan while adapting as best it can.

**Picture:** Aerial view of the enclosures at the breeding center of Kellé, Zinder region, Niger



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# They made it possible on the ground

**Maimounatou Ibrahim Mamadou** – Sahara Conservation Ostrich sites manager, oversees management of Ostrich breeding sites in Mainé and in Kellé and coordinates field activities.

**Boukar Arifa Brah** – Sahara Conservation Site Manager assistant, provides support on all activities and helps management of Kellé site.

**Harouna Moussa Lawan** – Sahara Conservation Kellé ostrich keeper, ensures daily care of ostriches and maintenance of site infrastructures.

**Habou Idi Malam Kaou** – Sahara Conservation Kellé ostrich keeper, ensures daily care of ostriches and maintenance of site infrastructures.

**Ousseini Idi Abdoulaye** – Sahara Conservation Kellé ostrich keeper, ensures daily care of ostriches and maintenance of site infrastructures.

**Oumara Ousseini Idi** – Sahara Conservation Mainé ostrich keeper, ensures daily care of the ostriches and site infrastructures.

**Ahmed Oumarou** – Sahara Conservation Driver, accompanies most field missions and provides logistical support.

**Souley Kouato Larwanou** – Sahara Conservation Administration & Finance Officer in Niger, provides assistance with accounting, administration and logistics for field missions.

**The support team** in Paris (Cloé Pourchier and Violeta Barrios) provided crucial assistance on the administrative, financial and reporting side of the operations, as well as in fundraising.

Special thank you to the authorities and all the people from the local communities in Niger who significantly help making it a success.



# Thank you

Funding from your organization helps to sustain Sahara Conservation's captive-breeding facilities, and to the overall goal of seeing this species run free again in Niger for the first time in decades. It contributes to support Sahara Conservation's vision of a Sahara where ecological processes function naturally; a Sahara that benefits all its inhabitants and where support for its conservation comes from stakeholders across all sectors of society.

Despite challenges faced, progress have been made over the semester and our team is dedicated to achieving the overall goal of reintroducing North African ostriches to the wild in Niger.

Together we make a difference, and our team is dedicated to pursuing its efforts for the wildlife and the people of the Sahelo-saharan landscape.



**Violeta Barrios**  
Program Manager

**Cloé Pourchier**  
Program Officer

