

Return of the Scimitar-horned Oryx to Chad

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Sahara Conservation Fund



project partners



هيئة البيئة - أبوظبي
Environment Agency - ABU DHABI



with technical support from



co-authors

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oryx are back in the wild



- Late 1980s the oryx became extinct in the wild (Chad and Niger)
- IUCN Red List status Extinct in the Wild since 2000
- Mid-1960s oryx captured in Chad for zoos on several continents
- Captive populations are today numerous with some 15-20,000 oryx
- Oryx repatriated to fenced protected areas in Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal
- No release into the wild before now



Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi
Achim Game
Reserve.

78,000 km²

Almost exactly the
same size as South
Carolina!
Sahelian grassland
and sub-desert
habitats.

recent project timeline

- March 14, 2016 Group 1 (25) arrive Chad
- July 21, 2016 Group 1 collared (Chad)
- August 14, 2016 Group 1 released (21)
- September 20, 2016 first wild born calf
- October 11, 2016 Group 2 collared (Abu Dhabi)
- November 14, 2016 Group 2 (25) arrive Chad
- January 18, 2017 Group 3 (24) arrive Chad
- January 21, 2017 Group 2 released (12 + 2 from Group 1)
- July, 2017 Group 3 to be collared
- August, 2017 remaining animals of Group 2 + Group 3 to be released
- October, 2017 Group 4 to arrive Chad

current situation



- 37 (14.23) oryx in the pre-release pens
- Main herd in the wild of 20 (8.12)
- Mother/calf pair (0.1.1)
- 1 solitary male
- Smaller herd of 13 (5.8)
- Total of 73 animals

arrival in chad by chartered Ilyushin cargo plane –
6 hours flight



transport & offloading
abu dhabi to basecamp \approx 30 hours



release into holding pens



custom-built oryx basecamp & 45ha holding pens



official release



oryx leaving the pens 15 august



oryx in the pre-release pens



monitoring



- Partners SCBI and ZSL
- Field trials
- Vectronic collars
- Iridium network
- Data transfer to field
- VHF capability
- Local monitoring team
- Alerts / Rapid response



procedures



tracking with vhf



oryx behaviour & social development



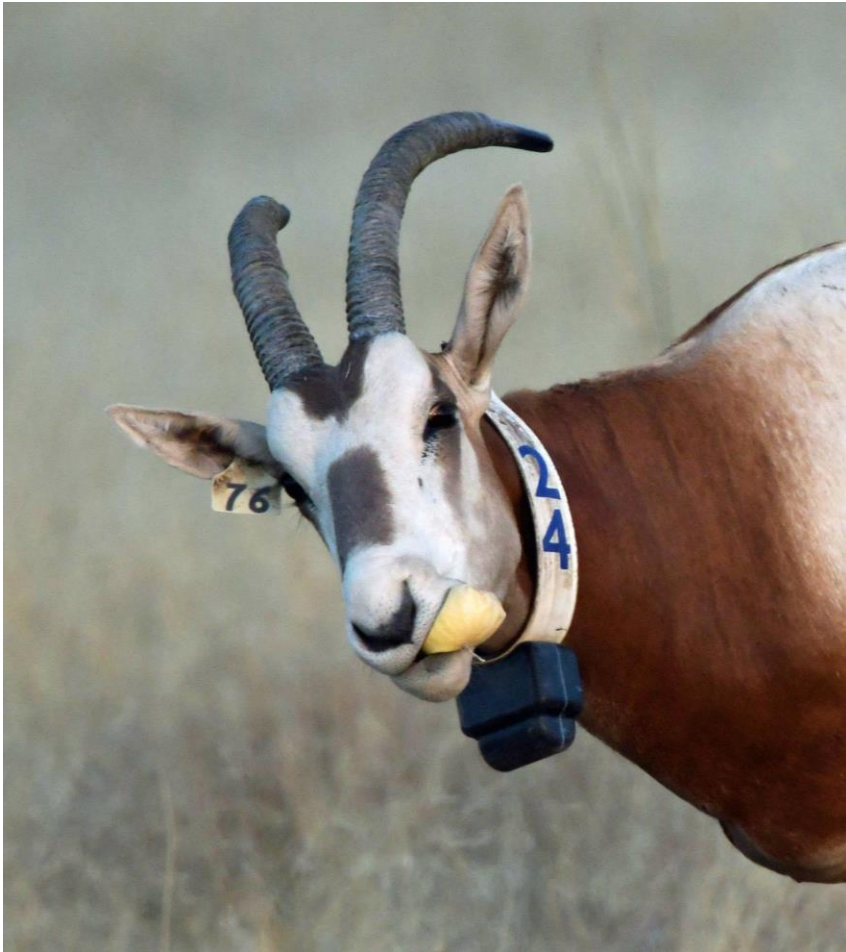
2016 wet season was exceptionally good



green plants are critical for survival



wild melon *citrullus colocynthis*



main herd of oryx released August 2016



first wild born oryx in 30 years



oryx help conserve dama gazelles

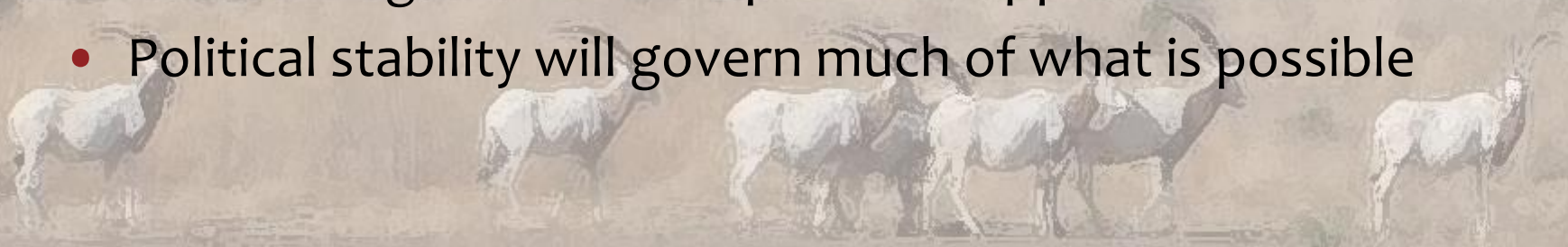


springboard for addax



future challenges

- Up to now has been the “easy” bit!
- Poaching – currently under control
- Integrating conservation and livestock development
- Habitat loss – natural and man-made -- bushfires
- Access to vital hot season grazing and shade
- Monitoring will help with assessment & conservation
- Cooperation between stakeholders is key
- Innovative management, zonation, etc.
- Maintaining national and political support
- Political stability will govern much of what is possible



is cohabitation possible?



poaching 1970s



education & awareness



building a community



pastoralists



bushfires



follow us

On the web:

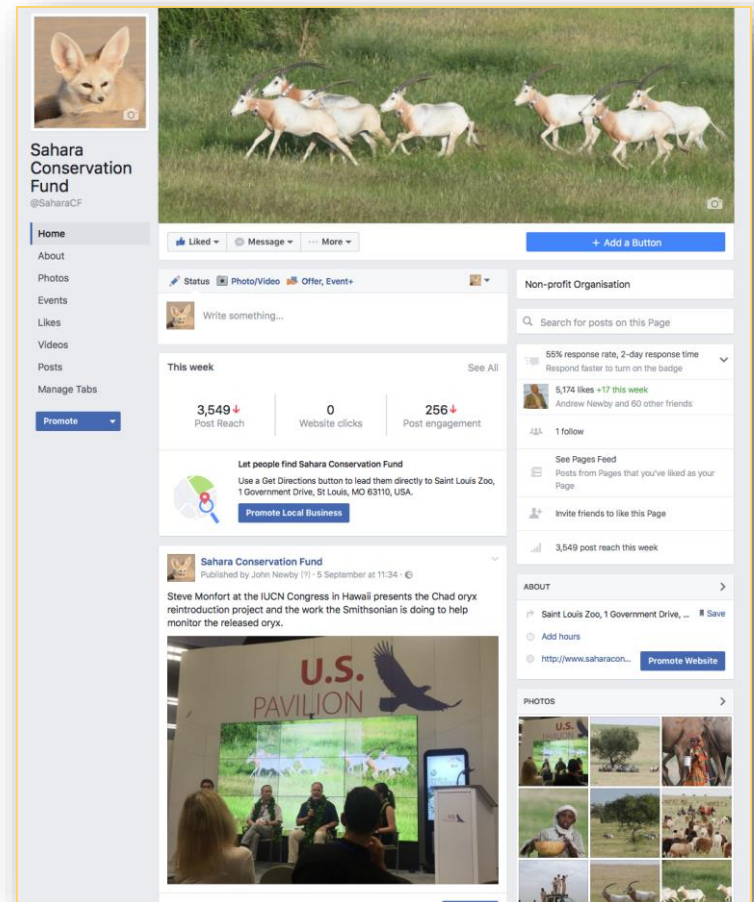
www.saharaconservation.org

Sandscript:

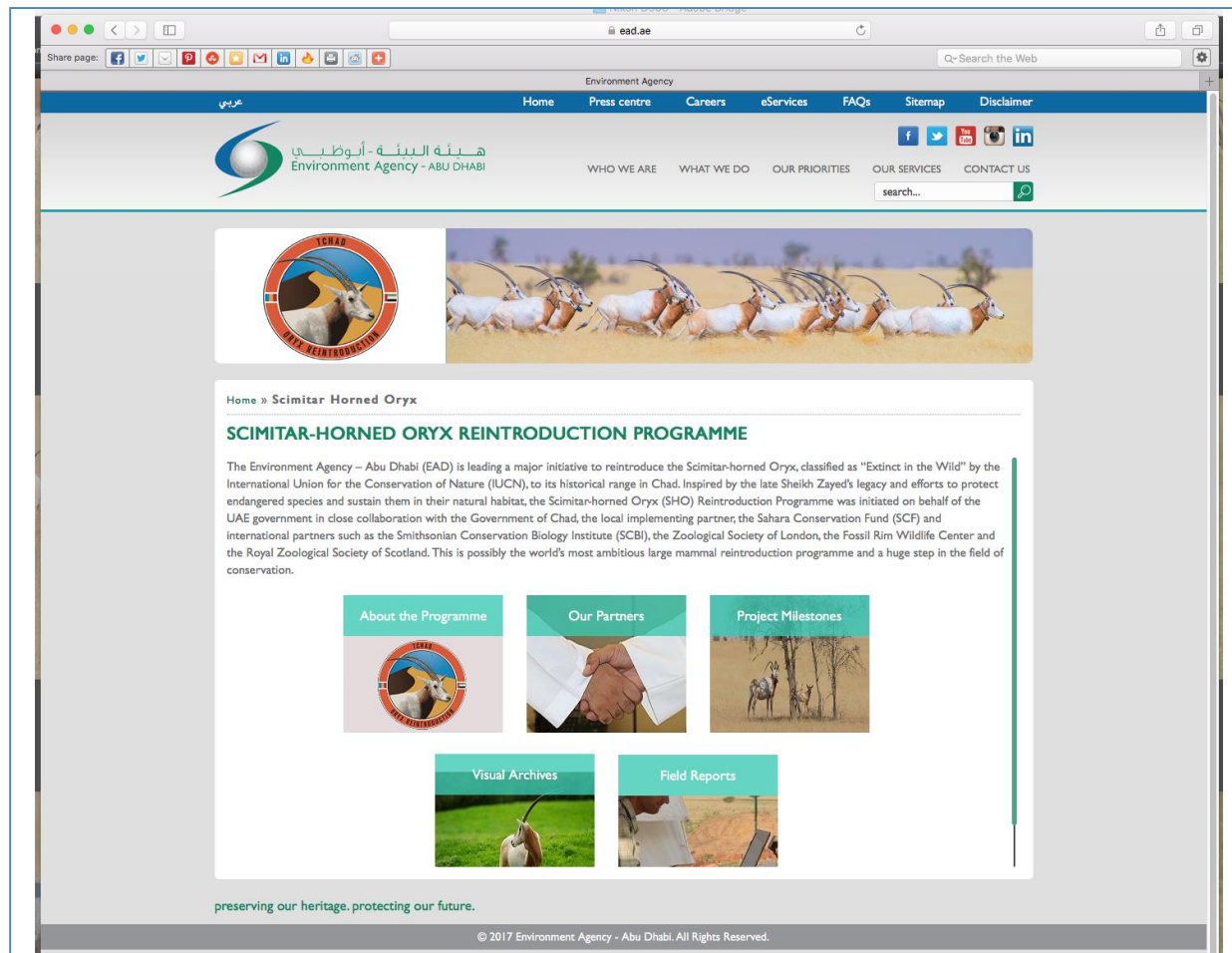
<http://www.saharaconservation.org/?-Sandscript->

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/saharacf>



EAD WEBSITE



oryx field bulletins & sandscript

CHAD ORYX REINTRODUCTION PROJECT FIELD MONITORING BULLETIN: 28 AUGUST 2016

- **Oryx Enclosure:** Two oryx in the pre-release enclosure, BLU 24 and BLU 29, checked and well. No tracks at outside water trough. Camera trap shows BLU 29, the young female drinking more often than the male BLU 24. Both resting by the trough regularly.
- **Red 28 and Y56:** The morning satellite fix for RED 28 was from 16.00 the previous day, showing she was travelling north nearly 50km north and 35km from us at the time of our search for her yesterday. Cherif Guet Chef de Secteur Nord and his team received this position by SMS at 06:00 and travelled to the area. They reported finding oryx tracks and seeing large numbers of livestock.
- **Main herd:** The monitoring team visited the main herd in the morning who remain south of Donki.
 - The livestock camp near the oryx on 26th was no longer there and the area was quiet.
 - We found water pools around the base of *Balanites* trees 50m from a sand sheet where the oryx had been resting, and several other pools of that type in the area; no oryx tracks were found approaching any of them, but the group certainly has access to free standing water.
 - Long range photos of collar wear on necks were obtained for several oryx (some examples attached). BLU 32 was still limping slightly, but her collar wear did not look as bad as previously. General body condition in the herd has improved since release, but perhaps not to the extent seen in the two animals held in the pre-release pen, who this evening seemed noticeably sleeker. The dominant male BLU 40, seen mating and squatting to defecate in pre-release, was seen defecating in a normal standing posture. This, the tendency to cluster tightly, and the relatively slow improvement in body condition in some individuals may all be indicators of stress of finding their way in these new circumstances. But in general the herd looked well and remained tolerant of our presence.
- **Public awareness:** 12 more contacts with local nomads were completed and the oryx project discussed. Only one group had not heard of the project.
- **VHF signal performance:** Approaching the main herd we heard only the tear-drop collar at 3.5km; at 2.1km we heard exactly half of the 18 collars in the group which at that stage had already been seen. Beside the herd all collars were found to be working.
- **Meteorology:** Routine data collection and data entry to PDA was carried out by Habib Ali Hamid
- **Other:** While approaching the main oryx herd a female Arabian bustard was seen moving from the track in a crouching posture. We found a single oval olive toned egg as a result. Displaying males and females crouching to hide in the grass are being seen regularly.



SAHARA CONSERVATION FUND

Sandscript

Number 19 Spring 2016



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As the hot season approaches and temperatures rise to over 45°C in the shade, many plants dry out but it's nice to see a few of the hardier perennials still in bloom.

They're back!

After weeks of "standing by", Justin Churen finally delivered the news I'd been waiting for: the inaugural shipment of 25 scimitar-horned oryx from Abu Dhabi to Chad was confirmed for March 14th 2016. More importantly, I'd passed required security clearances and there was a seat for me on the plane!

During the 12-hour flight from Washington to Dubai, I found my mind drifting back in time to 1998, the year I attended a Convention on Migratory Species meeting held in Djerba, Tunisia. That meeting brought together 14 range countries and international experts to discuss ways to help conserve Sahelo-Saharan antelopes. My takeaways from this meeting were that there was an ongoing biodiversity crisis unfolding in the Sahara, but sadly, there was no concerted effort underway to do anything about it. I was also surprised to learn how little connectivity existed between the world being done to sustain these species in human care and efforts designed to secure and restore these species to the wild.

Accompanying the first 25 pioneering oryx by air and overland to their new home in the Oaudi Rimé-Oaudi Achim Faunal Reserve was a great honor. And I'm not ashamed only they would act collectively. John Newby and I became fast friends, and we soon hatched a plan that led

rapidly to the establishment of the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group (SSIG), best described at the time as a "group of like-minded individuals". We soon morphed into the Sahara Conservation Fund, the only conservation organization fully committed to conserving the wildlife of the Sahara and its bordering Sahelian grasslands. As I fast-forward 18 years, I am awestruck that SCF has managed to inspire and coalesce its diverse partners from the private sector, zoos, non-governmental organizations, governments and civil society to work across multiple disciplines to achieve tangible conservation outcomes for species like the addax, ostrich, dama gazelle, and many others. Among our proudest achievements has been catalysing a great partnership between the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi and the government of Chad, a visionary relationship that has made it possible for all of us to fulfil a dream of re-establishing the iconic scimitar-horned oryx back onto the grassy Sahelian plains of Chad.

scured by the tears of joy and pride that streamed down my face. It is a moment I will always treasure. Of course, it is all too easy to forget that the real work lies ahead of us, and that the challenge of saving a species is really a "forever challenge". Even as we achieve important milestones we must remind ourselves of our rather audacious goal, which is no less than establishing multiple, self-sustaining and secure populations of scimitar-horned oryx that will roam free for many generations. Achieving this goal, and others, will require us to continue harnessing the knowledge, passion and will of like-minded people worldwide who understand the majesty and importance of deserts and the wildlife and people that rely upon them for survival.

*Dr Steve Mosfort
Chairman of SCF*



Steve Mosfort (left) and John Newby at Abéché airport



To be continued...