

Antelopes Successfully Reintroduced in Tunisia



Bonn, 10 December 2007 - Following the severe depletion of antelopes due to major and unsustainable hunting activities, CMS has been working with the Hanover Zoo and others to reintroduce them into the wild. Currently, more than 20 antelopes from European and North American zoo-based breeding programmes are being released in Tunisia, reinforcing the Tunisian Strategy for restoring the desert ecosystems. Tunisia has been actively engaged in the ongoing process of restoring semi-desert and desert environments, and in the reintroduction of several species typical to these environments,

for about 25 years.

For two of these species, the Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*) and the Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), a new round of reintroductions has started. 22 antelopes and their keepers left Europe from Luxemburg, arriving at Tozeur in the very early morning of the 7th. The animals are 4 male and 9 female *Addax nasomaculatus* and 4 male and 5 female *Oryx dammah*, and will be distributed to Djebil National Park and Senghar National Park. The Tunisian colleagues will be meeting them at Tozeur and accompanying them on their journey to the parks. The Scimitar-horned Oryx has gone from abundance to extinction in the wild within the space of a few short decades. Once a common sight in the Sahelian grasslands of North and sub-Saharan Africa, the last few remaining specimens probably disappeared from Chad and Niger during 1990s. Like most of the other inhabitants of the desert, the Oryx is able to satisfy its water requirements through the food it eats.

The Addax is a medium-sized antelope that inhabits the dunes of the Sahara. Formerly a common inhabitant of deserts across North Africa, from Morocco and Mauritania in the west to Egypt and Sudan in the east, the addax is today one of the rarest and most endangered species on earth. With probably less than 500 left in the wild, the species' survival depends on urgent and comprehensive conservation action in its last remaining strongholds in the Sahelian nations of Chad and Niger. Over-hunting is the most important cause of the Oryx's and Addax's demise; other factors, such as drought, desertification and habitat encroachment, also have had a cumulative impact. In the framework of the Sahelo-Saharan Antelope – CMS / Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondiale (FFEM) Project, a significant translocation operation of Addax and Scimitar Oryx was organised in Tunisia between February 18th and 27th 2007. A first group of 15 Addax, 5 males and 10 females, went to Djebil National Park, to the south of Douz. A second group, made up of 3 females and 2 males, went to Senghar National Park, a new Saharan park of which the area, still in negotiation at the national level, should be 250.000 ha. 3 male and 5 female Scimitar Oryx went to the Dghoumès National Park, on the border with Chott al Jarid 's, close to Tozeur. One adult male joined two females in a separate zone of Bou Hedema park. The translocation operation was a great success: all animals have arrived safe and sound in different acclimatising enclosures. In 1936 the first conservation measures for the Umbrella Acacia woodland in the Bou Hedema region in Tunisia were undertaken. In 1980, 16,488 hectares were designated as a National Park, of which 4,500 hectares were placed under particularly stringent protection. Over the last 25 years, there have been numerous reintroductions from zoo breeding programmes into the wild. Today the herds are not directly managed at all, but merely observed for data collection. Reproduction of the stock is regarded as good and naturally occurring. While 38 animals were counted in 1996, there were 70 Addax, together with a population of Scimitar-horned Oryx, in early 2004. In 2006, with a population of 130 Oryx and around 50 Addax, the results achieved up to now are remarkable. However, it was necessary to manage reintroduce the population from fenced reserves to the wide natural environment in the desert, via a network of national parks. Resources need to be mobilised to show that the conservation and sustainable development in these arid parts of the world can stimulate the economy and create new jobs, and develop local communities. This is how CMS and its partners will make the difference on the ground in cooperation with other parties to conserve terrestrial migratory species in Africa. The future protected area in Termit and the cross-border region between Niger and Chad are a crucial region, for which France and the European Commission are providing support to allow CMS and these countries to restore their unique heritage of antelopes and their habitats. Given continuing commitment and support, a new day is dawning for Sahelo-Saharan wildlife.