



Oryx and Addax in Chad

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In December 1974 I was privileged to make a fifteen-day journey in the northern reaches of the vast Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim Faunal Reserve in the sub-saharan belt of the Republic of Chad. In size this reserve is comparable with Scotland and it has received much less attention than is its due. Created in 1969 to protect ostrich *Struthio camelus*, cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus*, addax *Addax nasomaculatus* and scimitar-horned oryx, *Oryx dammah*, it is of particular significance to the oryx, harbouring one of the few viable wild breeding populations. My guide to the reserve was John E. Newby, a British ecologist who has been studying its wildlife for the past three years; he helped me to appreciate the enormous difficulties involved in protecting its endangered species.

Ouadi Rimé–Ouadi Achim is a faunal reserve and not a national park – in effect, a compromise between the contradictory interests of the wildlife and the indigenous human populations. Large numbers of nomadic tribesmen, Arab and Gorane herders of camels, goats, sheep and cattle, have the right of unrestricted passage within its boundaries and of pasture for their animals. They pose a twofold threat to all the endangered species, especially addax and oryx. Direct poaching, both by the nomads themselves and by military personnel from outside, takes a heavy toll. Even more ominous in the long term is the fact that the mere presence of the nomads and their herds effectively excludes oryx and addax from the reserve's best pasture for most of the year.

The gravity and immediacy of both these threats were brought home to me in our journey. We went north to the extreme limit of the sub-desert grasslands, and found no addax at all. We were forced to conclude that they had moved further north into desert regions inaccessible to motor vehicles. Oryx were present in good numbers, but only on the less-than-satisfactory pasture of the far north, and they were extraordinarily timid and unapproachable. Fully three months after the end of the rainy season, all the best pasture in the northern part of the reserve was still occupied by the camel herdsman, and there were horses at every encampment, animals which in these regions are used exclusively for hunting.

As recently as 1936 the French naturalist Malbrant sighted a herd of about 10,000 oryx in Chad. Mr Newby estimates that today there are fewer than 8000 in the whole country, most of them within the confines of the reserve.

The reserve guards have managed to some extent to alleviate the poaching pressure on the addax and oryx populations, but their equipment is woefully inadequate to cope with the task of constantly patrolling so vast an area. To complicate matters, the two existing bases of operations for the camel patrols which bear the brunt of the surveillance work are inconveniently located at towns on the edge of the reserve, from which the antelopes' feeding grounds

are all but inaccessible much of the year for lack of dependable watering points. Things improved considerably last year, when the Arada base received a Land Rover and a Saviem lorry given by the World Wildlife Fund, but the coverage is still far from adequate.

John Newby tells me – and everything in the reserve bears him out – that, unless the present effort to preserve the addax and the scimitar-horned oryx is redoubled in the near future, these species will within ten years have become extinct.

The first step must be the establishment of a centrally placed guard post from which the camel patrols could operate year-round and keep a close watch on both the human and antelope populations. A suitable site for such a post has been selected near the western terminus of the Wadi Achim, just below the 16th parallel, at the dead centre of the oryx's yearly migration pattern and well within the southern limit of the addax habitat, and Newby hoped to begin construction in 1975.

The proposed site is a thickly wooded wadi, a major collection zone for water during the short-lived rainy season from July to September. It would be ideal for an ornithological research station to study the Palaearctic migrants that visit the area in their thousands as well as the indigenous species. It is hoped the station will eventually offer accommodation to visiting scientists and others for the study of Sahelian ecology.

An ultimate development might be a tourist lodge, and the revenue thus brought into the country would certainly increase government interest in safeguarding the endangered species which make the Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Reserve unique.

Drawings by Denys Ovenden from The Red Book (Collins)

Facts about Whales

Among the many services performed for the cause of conservation by the Friends of the Earth, not least is the production of their *Whaling Campaign Manual*, now in an invaluable second and completely revised edition. Nowhere else can one read so compendious an account of the iniquities, sloth and backsliding of the International Whaling Commission, fully abetted in earlier days by Her Majesty's Government. Even now that HMG acknowledges the need for strict conservation and supports the Stockholm Moratorium, it does not by any means, as the Manual points out, do all that it could to help the whales. Sperm oil, for instance, is still imported – in 1971 from an unsuspected whale stock in the Lake of Geneva, judging by the fact that ten tons were imported from Switzerland in that year. The new Manual continues to be an indispensable companion for anybody who takes whaling politics seriously, and it is clear that it is only through politics that the whales will finally be saved. At a time when food is becoming short throughout the world, two large nations, one capitalist and one socialist, should not be allowed to hog a quite disproportionate part of the world's stock of whales, still less to feed so much of it to pets. Once the moratorium is achieved, hopefully in 1975, the stocks should be able to build up again to provide a substantial contribution towards the natural resources of the world in the later 1980s and 1990s.

Sierra Leone Mammals—a Correction

In the article on Sierra Leone in the November 1974 *Oryx* the list of mammals included Abbot's duiker. This should have been yellow-backed duiker *Cephalophus silvicultor*.