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Fears for Scimitar-horned Oryx

The Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx algazel*) is gravely threatened with extinction within the next decade in Chad, where it has its last main refuge, according to a report received by the World Wildlife Fund. It is one of the few herbivores which can exist in the harsh climatic and vegetational conditions of the Sahelian and allied regions of Africa. There used to be enormous numbers of it; but in the past century—especially the last 30 years—poaching, aided by motor vehicles and advanced weapons, and human activity in its traditional range, have reduced it to a few thousands. There are some 6,000 still in Chad, of which between 60% and 80% are in the vast Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Faunal Reserve. Between 1972 and 1976, intensive protection measures were enforced and, with reasonably good rains and pastoral conditions, the Oryx thrived.

In 1976 the rains failed, however, and shortage of fuel and spare parts, as well as the disturbed political situation,

has seriously reduced anti-poaching patrols. In search of food the Scimitar-horned Oryx are moving into areas where they are more vulnerable than hitherto. As a result, any earlier population increase is being lost. Now a report to the World Wildlife Fund indicates that, unless poaching control can be restored to former levels, 'the next five years will certainly see the Oryx population decline to such a degree that they [will] become non-viable as a self-sustaining reproductive group. From that stage, the end is not far away.'

The World Wildlife Fund has been providing funds for vehicles, patrol camels, guards' personal equipment, fuel, and spares, as part of the effort to save this Oryx, which could once again be a valuable source of meat and skins if their numbers were restored and properly managed.

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