Towards the effective management of the Arabian oryx Oryx leucoryx in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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1 Introduction

In Saudi Arabia the historical distribution of the Arabian oryx was closely associated with the distribution of the azilian sands. During the 1930's the remaining Arabian oryx in Saudi Arabia occurred in two populations which are approximately 1,100 km apart. These are the Great Bahád in the north, and in the 'Al Ula' Khalj basin in the south (Figure 1). Historically the ad-Dhahna sand belt probably served as a migration route between the northern and southern Arabian oryx populations. The demise and the subsequent rescue of the Arabian oryx in the Arabian Peninsula has been well documented (GEMMAK, 1962, STANLEY-PRICE, 1989) and the rescue operation has been a major success story in conservation (STANLEY-PRICE, 1989; SOLON, 1993).

![Figure 1: The Arabian Peninsula indicating the main sand areas within Saudi Arabia shaded blue. Source: Adapted from Shawed (1983)](image)

During 1986, an Arabian oryx captive-breeding programme was started at the National Wildlife Research Centre at 'Ain in Saudi Arabia. Intensive management overcame various problems such as tuberculosis, and the captive herd steadily increased to later become the genetically most diverse captive herd in the world (FLAMAX, et al., 1994). The successful captive breeding programme and the timely proclamation of protected areas in Saudi Arabia culminated in the reintroduction of the Arabian oryxes into the unfenced 'Unq Batin Massif.