The Abruzzo chamois, back on the Majella Massif.

About a dozen Abruzzo chamois (Rupicapra pyrenaica omala) were released in July onto the Majella Massif, Italy, with the help of WWF-Italy, the Abruzzo National Park, and the Italian Army. The chamois were bred in captivity in WWF-Italy's Oasis (Wildlife Refuge) at Lama dei Peligni. This was the first phase of an attempt to repopulate the Majella, where the subspecies had been extinct for several decades following intensive hunting and sheep-rearing. The total residual population of Abruzzo chamois is only 400-450 individuals, up from 40 in 1949 and 150 in 1989, most in the Val di Rose of the Camosciara Massif with a further 20 in the Faunistic Area of Biscgna, Abruzzo National Park.

For the complete success of the population recovery, which will include a re-introduction on the Gran Sasso Massif, it is necessary that these important Apennine zones be properly safeguarded with the creation of new parks and protected areas; the first step was on 12 July by the creation of the Regional Natural Reserve of Eastern Majella.

From a WWF-Italy press release, 9 July 1991

Rhino re-introduction programme in Dudwa National Park, India

Present rhino populations are restricted to seven reserves in Assam and Bengal, India, and the Royal Chitwan N.P., Nepal, with the major populations in Kaziranga N.P., Assam (1080) and Royal Chitwan N.P. (375). The remaining populations survive in small, insecure pockets with a doubtful future. These include about 60 rhinos in Pobitara Sanctuary (16 sq.km.) which represents the highest density of rhinos wandering widely in surrounding agricultural areas.

In spite of protective measures and efforts by field managers, persecution of the animals continues due to the very high price of horn on the illegal market. In Kaziranga N.P. between 1983 and 1989, 235 rhinos were lost to poachers. In the first two months of 1990, 16 were killed. In Jaldapara Sanctuary, W. Bengal, the rhino population has been reduced from 80 to 30 in the last two decades, and the Laokowa population has been totally wiped out.

The first experimental re-introduction of the Indian one-horned rhino into Dudwa N.P. took place in 1984. There were initial setbacks with the loss of two cows, (one due to stress, the other to an accident) out of a nucleus of two males and three cows translocated from Assam. In 1985, four more females were translocated from Nepal to the rhino re-introduction area (25 sq.km.) in Dudwa.

In 1988, the two bulls fought continuously, with the result that the dominant bull had to be seperated from the population and released in an enclosure, where he eventually died of haemorrhagic septicemia. In 1987, the first evidence of breeding was noticed, but the calf was found dead and the cause of death not confirmed.

In 1989, four calves were born to the four females from Nepal. One calf, a male, died of pneumonia in January 1990, at one month of age. Although such mortality is normal in the wild, it represents a serious loss to the translocated population, which stands at five adult cows, one bull and three calves. Further translocations are needed to ensure the future of the population.

Contributed by Dr. S.P. Sinha, Wildlife Institute of India.

Idmi in Saudi Arabia

Indigenous ungulates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have suffered in recent years from hunting and over-grazing of their natural habitats. Two species, the oryx (Oryx leucoryx) and the ari or Saudi gazelle (Gazella saudiva) are extinct in the wild and the others are greatly restricted in numbers and range. Captive breeding programmes were set up in the Kingdom by the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development for three ungulate species, which are now the subjects of re-introduction programmes.
The King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre (KKWRC) at Thumamah was set up in 1987 under the management of the Zoological Society of London, to develop an existing private animal collection of the late King Khalid. Breeding programmes initiated then for the sand gazelle or rheem (G. subgutturosa marica) and the mountain gazelle, or idmi, (G. g. gazella) have resulted in re-introductions of both species in 1991.

The rheem project has been carried out in cooperation with the National Wildlife Research Centre in Taif. The NWRC has been working with oryx from Thumamah since 1986 and started a release programme with them and animals from San Diego and Jordan in 1990. The re-introduction site is a large fenced area to the west, at Mahazat as Sayd. Rheem have now been released into the same area.

In December 1990 the first group of idmi were moved to the pre-release site in the Special Ibex Reserve of Howth Bani Tamim. This Reserve is to the south of Riyadh and covers 1700 sq.km. of a limestone escarpment with four large wadi systems running through it. The Reserve supports a healthy population of ibex (Capra ibex) and, until 30-40 years ago, had idmi and affr populations.

Some of the wadi heads have been fenced off to protect them from the resident camel population. These areas are to be used for the re-introductions giving the idmi a better quality vegetation in the early days of their release. The idea of the fences is to stop the camels entering certain areas but allowing the idmi free range outside these fences. This protection will also provide better feeding areas for the ibex.

Thirty idmi have now been moved to Howth. Ten animals have radio-collars and are being monitored on a regular basis. One of the advantages of the wadi system is that most of the animals are being seen frequently giving more detailed information of their movements.

To date there have been four recorded deaths but two animals have not been seen since the first few days of their release. Eight neonates have been recorded and these are developing well. Most of these were conceived in captivity, but later ones were conceived in the wild. Generally, the animals seem to be holding their condition despite rather harsh summer conditions, although some pregnant animals did lose condition during late pregnancy and early lactation.

Unfortunately, there was little rain this winter and the vegetation was not as good as was hoped. Therefore, water is being made available to the idmi while they acclimatise and get to know the area. There are two natural springs near to the release site so by this coming winter the artificial supply will be removed.

Further releases, using different wadis, are scheduled for the end of 1991. Eventually, the hope is that animals will start to move between the wadis taking advantage of the better food supply in the protected areas.

Botanical surveys are being carried out to monitor the impact of camels grazing in the Reserve and to ascertain the dietary needs of the gazelles and ibex. This will provide invaluable information for the selection of future release sites. It is also planned to draw up a management protocol for the Reserve, allowing rotational grazing in certain areas.

Contributed by Nick Lindsay, Curator, KKWRC.

THE NEW RSG LOGO
Our new logo depicts six species which are being, or have been, re-introduced into the wild. They are: the plant Ruizia cordata (Reunion Is.); Arabian oryx (Oman and Saudi Arabia); black-footed ferret (USA); a parrot (several projects); and a frog (several projects). As you can see, all the animals are enjoying their new-found freedom.