
Rewilding The Sahara and The Sahel

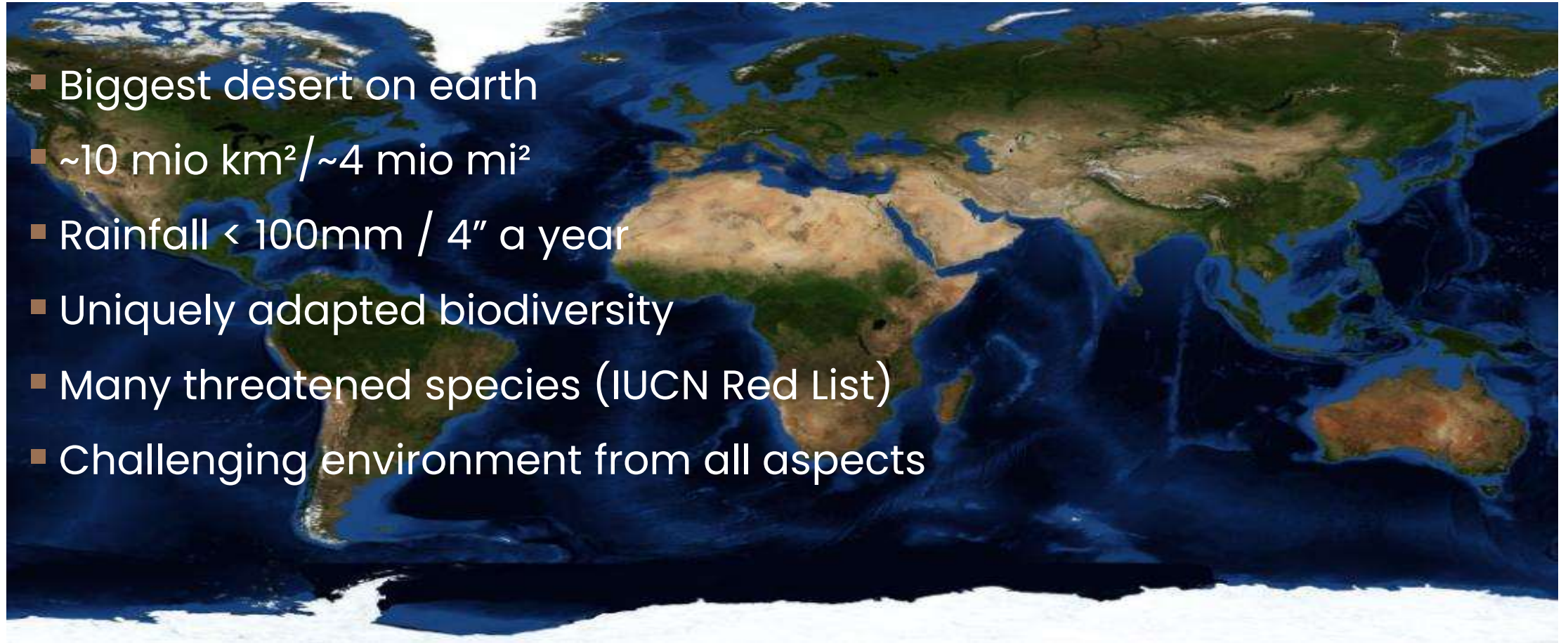
**John Watkin – CEO – SaharaConservation
Presentation to African Wildlife Foundation**

February 8th, 2023



The Sahara – a conservation orphan

- Biggest desert on earth
- ~10 mio km²/~4 mio mi²
- Rainfall < 100mm / 4" a year
- Uniquely adapted biodiversity
- Many threatened species (IUCN Red List)
- Challenging environment from all aspects



SaharaConservation

- SaharaConservation was established in 2004 (as Sahara Conservation Fund)
- Only international NGO dedicated to conserve the biodiversity of this vast and dynamic region.
- Offices in France, Chad and Niger
- Over 60 staff
- Board members committed to conservation of African arid-land species & habitats



We are evolving

- New 2025 Strategic Plan
- New branding
- Improved financial management systems
- New Board members
- Growing team in all locations

A large herd of oryx running across a dry, yellowish-brown desert landscape under a clear sky. The oryx have white bodies with reddish-brown necks and long, curved horns.

**Strategic
plan**

2025

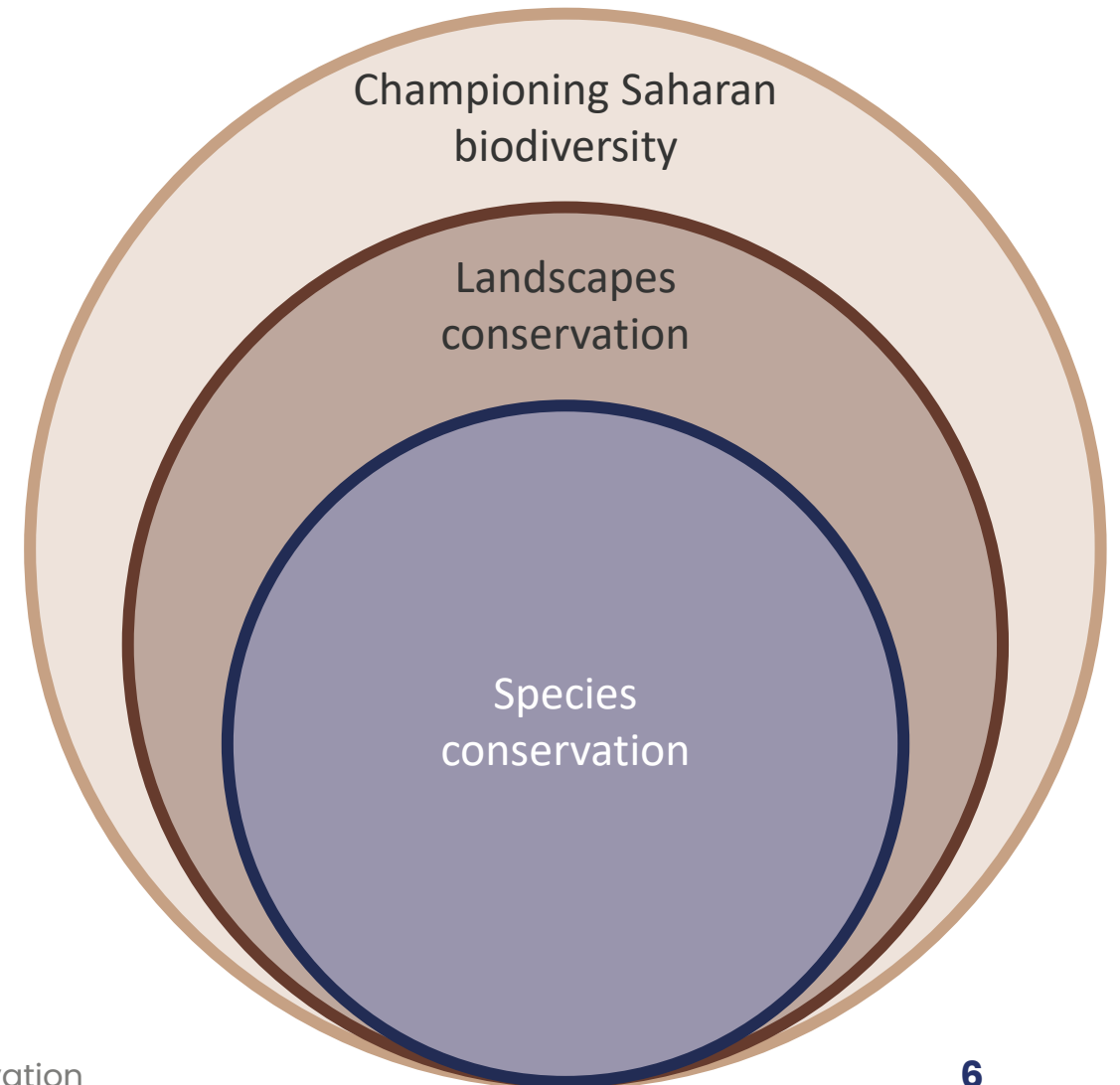
Our Vision and Mission

- **Vision:** A Sahara where ecological processes function naturally, with plants and animals existing in healthy numbers across their historical range, benefiting all its inhabitants, and where support for its conservation comes from stakeholders across all sectors of society
- **Mission:** To conserve the wildlife, habitats, and other natural resources of the Sahara and its bordering Sahelian grasslands to the benefit of all people and wildlife



SaharaConservation: Championing the Sahara

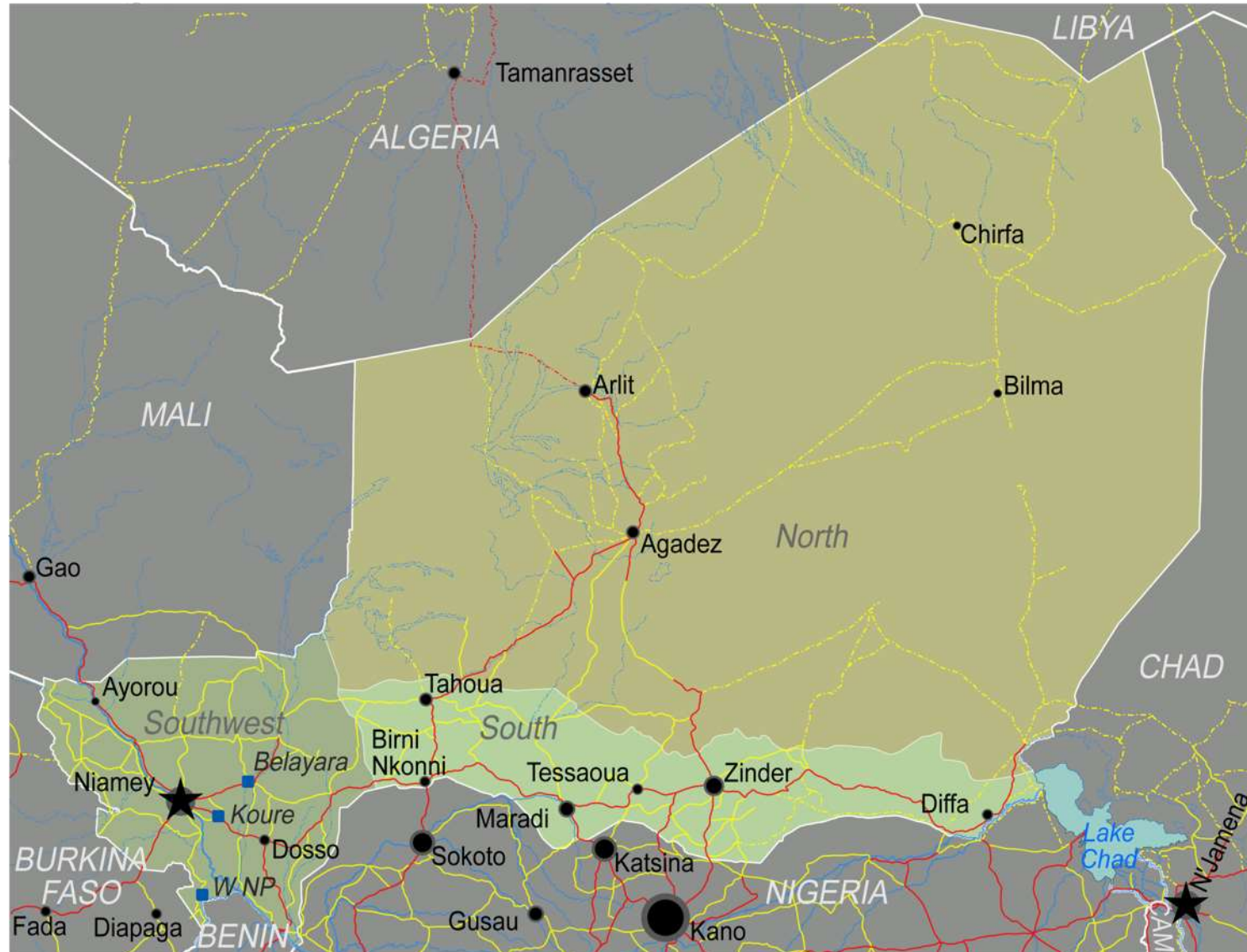
- An integrated three-pillar approach including:
 - ▶ Championing Saharan Biodiversity
 - ▶ Landscapes conservation
 - ▶ Species conservation
- Provide technical assistance to further reintroduction and rewilding projects
- Reinforce existing develop new partnerships for conservation action
- Raise awareness and funds for Sahel and Sahara conservation



Championing Saharan biodiversity

- Convene the annual Sahel & Sahara Interest Group (SSIG) meeting:
 - ▶ Only forum to address urgent conservation issues across the Sahel and Sahara region
 - ▶ Unique role as a gathering for people to meet, network, share information and build strong partnerships

Sahara Conservation in Niger



Sahara Conservation in Niger

■ SPECIES:

- ▶ Monitoring Dama gazelles (Nanger dama), **CR**
- ▶ Tackling threats to six species of endangered vultures (**EN & CR**)
- ▶ Helping save the West African giraffes (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*), **VU**
- ▶ North African Ostrich (*Struthio camelus camelus*) *in situ* captive breeding sites (**Extinct in the wild in Niger**)



SaharaConservation in Niger

■ LANDSCAPES:

- ▶ Capacity building: local community ecoguards and management units trained and equipped
- ▶ Anti poaching missions



SaharaConservation in Niger

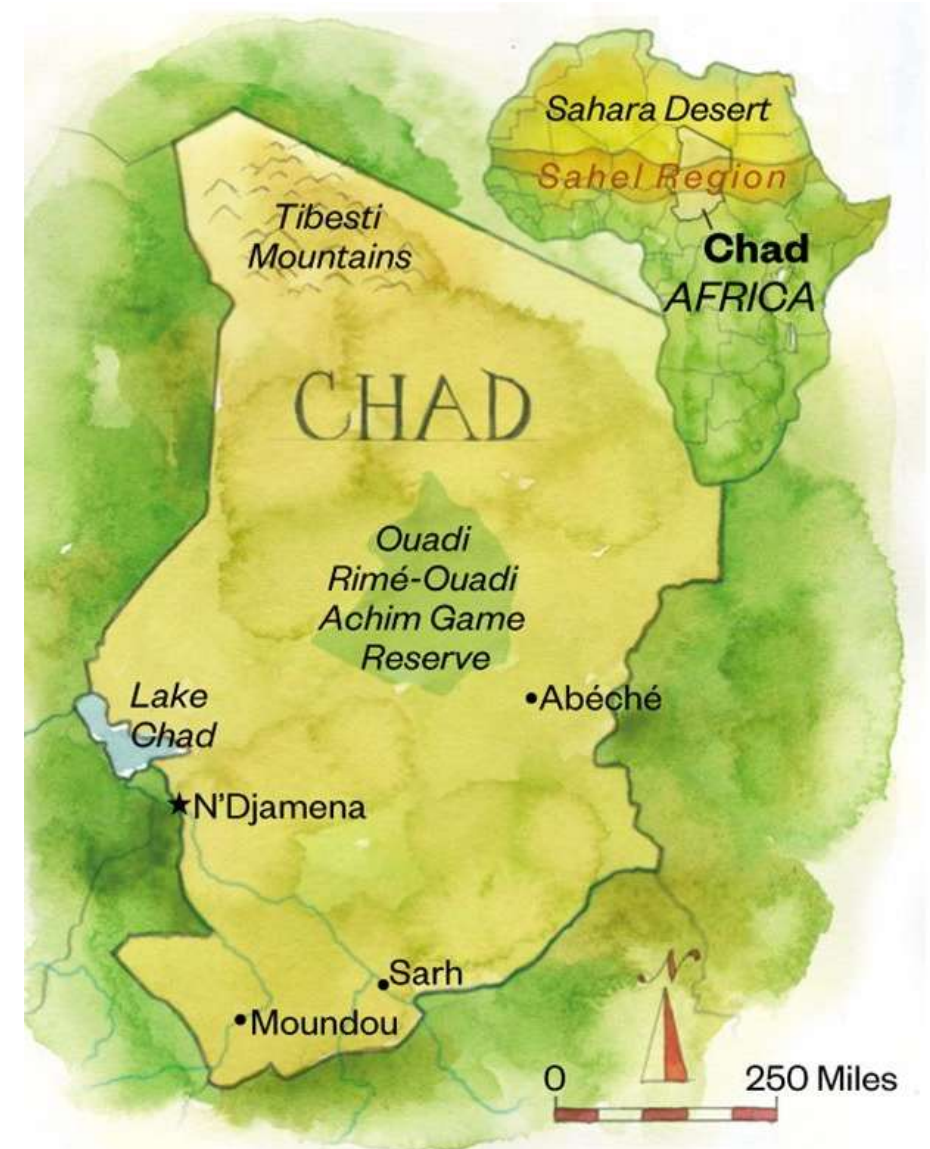
■ COMMUNITIES:

- ▶ Supporting remote local communities through health and dental missions
- ▶ Awareness raising of local communities regarding the role of vultures and the need to protect them
- ▶ Schools support



Sahara Conservation in Chad

- Focus on Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve
- 78,000 km² (size of Indiana)
- Original home of oryx, addax, dama and dorcas gazelles
- Site of a unique program to restore the reserve's large mammal fauna



Rewilding: some history

- Program began with oryx in 2016 after several years of preparation
- Animals sourced from Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi collection
- 2020 saw program expanded to include addax, dama gazelle and ostrich



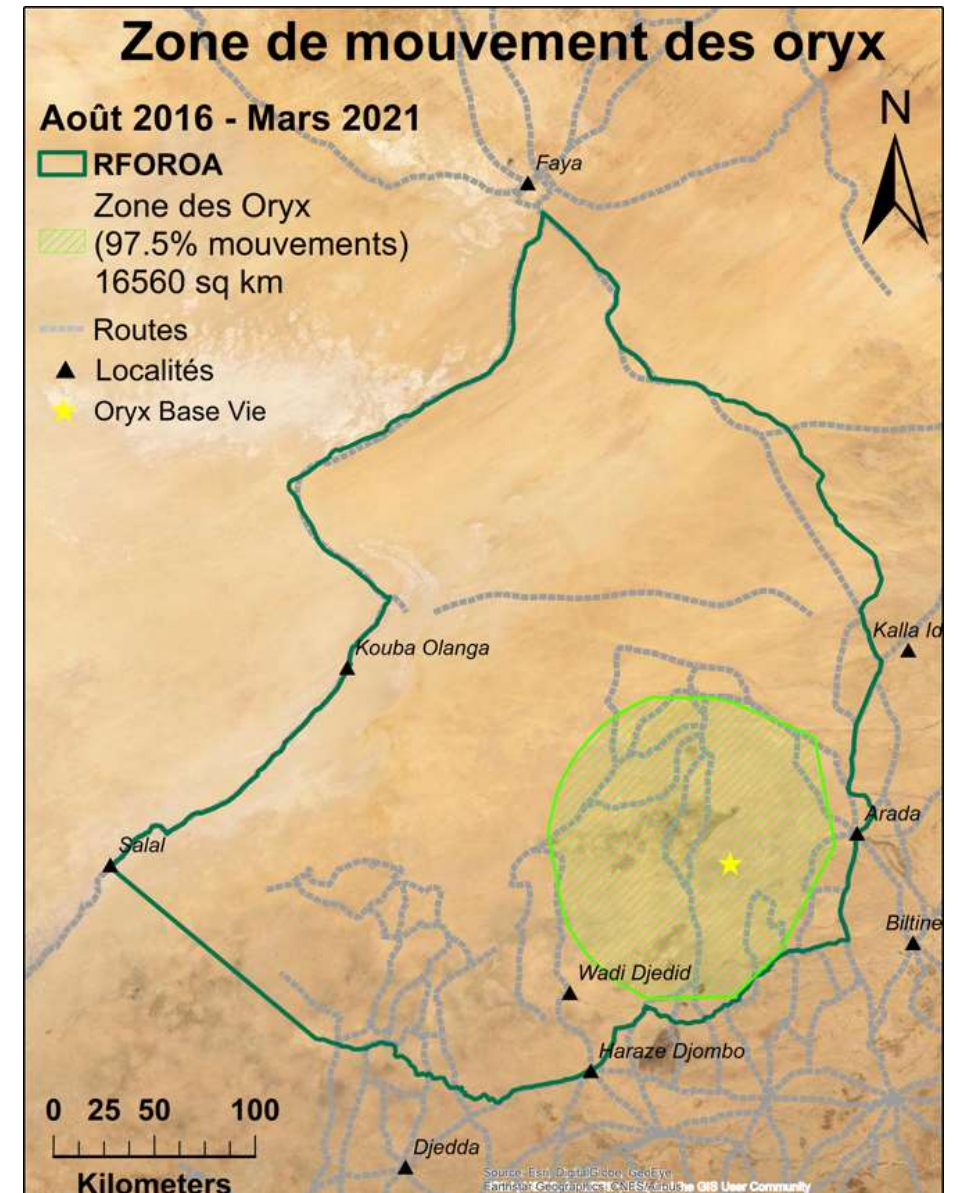
Goals and milestones

- A secure, viable and free-ranging meta-population of oryx distributed over historical range
- A secure population of at least 500 breeding adults (Population Viability Analysis to review)
- Reclassification to a lower threat level on the IUCN Red Data List (EW → CR or EN)

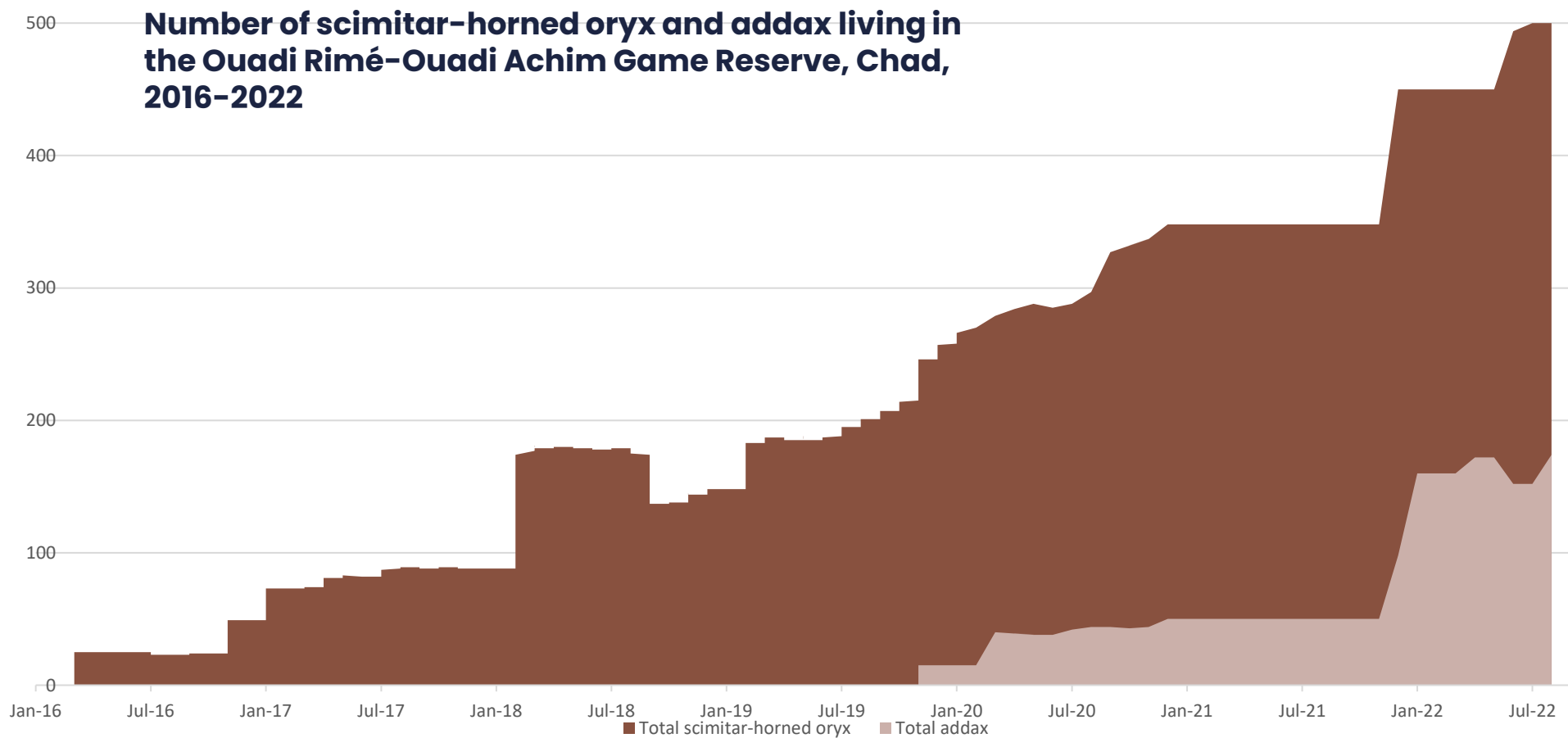


Post-release monitoring

- Monitoring is undertaken in partnership with Smithsonian National Zoo Conservation Biology Institute and Zoological Society of London
- Data from satellite collars provides rapid feedback to the team on the ground of remote movements and alerts of possible death
- Ratio of collared to uncollared means that monitoring is shifting from individual to population scale



The numbers speak for themselves





In situ reinforcement of dama gazelles

- January 2020: Three female dama gazelles were transferred from the Manga region, Chad to the enclosures at Oryx base camp
- One male from OROAGR added to start a breeding program
- “Passive capture” of two males and three females from the wild
- Six calves have been born
- March 2022: Five female damas transferred to OROAGR from EAD
- Active breeding program of 15 (3♂ and 12♀) to reinforce the wild population in place

Challenges

- Managing critical habitats in the Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim game reserve (fire, land use, access, desertification)
- Maintaining support from local communities
- Managing livestock / wildlife dynamics (disease, over-grazing, stocking levels)
- Political stability / security (linked to an eventual upsurge in poaching)





Sahara Conservation in Morocco

- In 2019, 32 addax were translocated from Souss Massa National Park and reintroduced into the 500km² M'hamid El-Ghizlane Reserve.



In-country logistics and infrastructures





Some of the team members



Our main supporters and government partners



Thanks to our partners





saharaconservation.org

Thanks for your interest
Any questions?

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