

Operation Oryx – End of Phase One

Five Arabian oryx from San Diego Wildlife Park arrived by air in Oman in March – stage one of the ambitious plan to reintroduce Arabian oryx in the Jiddat al Harasis described in the November 1978 *Oryx* by Hartmut Jungius of WWF International. If they can be successfully established in the wild (after an acclimatisation period) this will be the triumphant conclusion of an operation that began in 1961 in the offices of the FPS. A future issue of *Oryx* will tell the whole story.

Meanwhile there have been developments on the World Herd front. The new Captive Breeding Specialist Group of the IUCN Survival Service Commission decided at its first meeting last November to make the preparation of a management plan for all Arabian oryx in the studbook its first priority, and the representatives of the Arabian Oryx World Herd Trustees, at San Diego last November, made some fairly radical recommendations to their governing bodies. It is now proposed that as from April 1 1980 the ownership of all animals in the World Herd should be formally transferred to the zoos which hold them (San Diego, Brownsville, East Berlin, Hanover, Zürich, Rotterdam), subject to San Diego carrying out its offer to provide stock for future reintroductions and to the European zoos supplying London Zoo with animals equivalent to the numbers they have received from the World Herd. Further, SSC is to be asked to set up within its Antelope Specialist Group a sub-group on Arabian oryx, to monitor the Captive Breeding Group's management plan. Finally, it is proposed that, as its functions are now being performed by other bodies, the World Herd Trusteeship should be dissolved as from April 1 1980. These recommendations have been accepted by the FPS Council, with certain provisos.

The background to these decisions is that the World Herd had become only a comparatively small proportion of the Arabian oryx now in captivity, so successful has the breeding of these animals in captivity been in recent years. The World Herd in November 1979 consisted only of 50 animals in the United States (40 at the San Diego Wild Animal Park, 10 at Brownsville Zoo) and 15 animals in Europe (at East Berlin, Rotterdam and Zürich Zoos). Outside the World Herd there were 216 animals: 83 in the United States (48 at Phoenix, Arizona and 35 at Los Angeles) and the rest (apart from a single animal at Rabat, Morocco) in the Middle East. Of these 90 are known to be in Qatar, most of them belonging to the ruler's two herds, and smaller numbers in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Bahrain and Iraq. The numbers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai are presently unknown. Thus the total is almost certainly over 300.

The Fauna Preservation Society, as the originator of Operation Oryx, wishes to place on record its warm gratitude to all those bodies whose co-operation has made this remarkable success possible. Special thanks go to the World Wildlife Fund International, whose grant saved the project at a critical moment, and to the Arizona Zoological Society and Zoological Society of San Diego, whose zoos have borne the brunt of the effort of actually maintaining the animals in captivity. WWF International, in the person of Dr Hartmut Jungius, in co-operation with Ralph Daly, Adviser for the Conservation of the Environment in Oman, has also master-minded the latest return of oryx to Arabia.

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