



## Arabian Oryx, *Oryx leucoryx*

**Legal Status:** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists the Arabian oryx as Endangered. It is also listed by CITES as an Appendix I species. IUCN lists it as Endangered. Arabian oryx were believed to have been completely exterminated from the wild by 1972, and reintroduction programs are responsible for all wild populations in the Middle East.

**Description:** The Arabian oryx is a graceful white antelope notable for its long straight horns. It is deer-sized (ca. 150 lb./67 kg.) and has black markings on its legs and face. It has moderately long legs with broad hooves for running on sand.

**Range:** Historically the Arabian oryx ranged over most of the Arabian Peninsula, the Sinai Peninsula, Israel, Jordan and Iraq. Today, the Arabian oryx lives only in special protected reserves in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel.

**Habitat:** Arabian oryx prefer areas possessing gravel plains and fringes of sand desert. They occasionally dig hollows under rocks and bushes with their horns and hooves for shade and hiding.

**Diet:** Arabian oryx feed primarily on grasses, along with herbs, fruit and roots, and is best described as an arid-region grazer. Like many desert antelope, they can exist for weeks without water but move to areas of recent rainfall in order to feed upon new grasses.



**Social Organization:** Oryx are herd animals which center around an adult bull, several adult cows and their offspring. Arabian oryx tend to maintain visual contact with other herd members, subordinate males taking positions between the main body of a herd and outlying females. If separated, males will search areas where the herd last visited, settling into a solitary existence until the herd's return. Where water and grazing conditions permit, male oryx establish territories. Bachelor males are solitary. Aside from man, wolves are the only natural enemy of the Arabian oryx.

**Threats to Survival:** Hunting was the primary reason for the demise of wild Arabian oryx. Its meat and hide were prized, as were its lengthy horns. The northern herd was extirpated in the 1940's and, with the availability of military-surplus equipment, sport-hunters using four-wheel-drive vehicles, claimed the last of the wild Arabian oryx in Arabia in the 1960's.

Although protected by law in all countries where it has been reintroduced, oryx poaching has again become very serious and in 1996 the reintroduced population was reduced to 130 or so animals, of which only about 35 are females; twenty females are now in the Jaaluni enclosure as a precaution against total extirpation. Information about this situation has reached the Sultan of Oman and efforts are being made to coordinate with other states in the region to stop the trade in oryx. Although it is difficult to determine exactly who is responsible for the illegal collection of oryx, some are known to have been taken for private collections, and the demand for captive animals in the UAE and other Gulf state is currently the region's greatest conservation problem.

**Zoo Programs:** The Arabian oryx would be extinct today if it were not for the captive breeding efforts of zoos. In 1962 a breeding herd was begun at the Phoenix Zoo which consisted of animals from the London Zoo, the private collection of King Saud of Saudi Arabia, the ruler of Kuwait, and three of the last wild oryx captured during a special expedition. A 1972 expedition found no oryx remained in the wild. The first reintroduction of captive-bred animals occurred in 1982 when a dozen oryx were returned to Oman under the protection of Sultan Qaboos, and additional reintroductions have occurred thereafter. Today, there are over 1450 Arabian oryx worldwide, including 500 animals in the wild. In North America, there are over 3,000 animals in captivity, including over 400 in zoos; the rest are in private collections. The Antelope TAG has allotted 250 spaces in participating institutions.



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