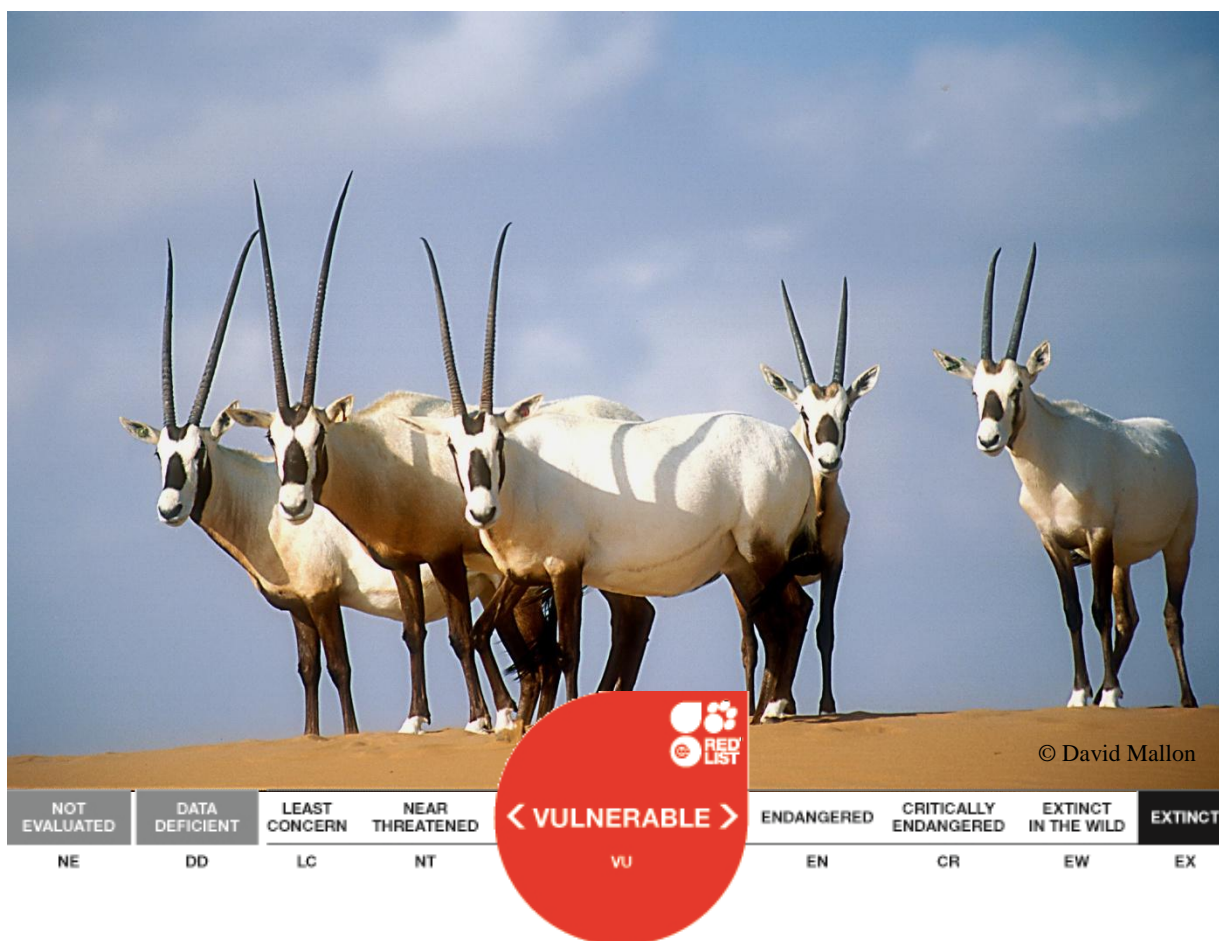


The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ 2011 update

The Arabian Oryx – A conservation success story



The Arabian or White Oryx ([Oryx leucon](#)) is a large species of antelope endemic to the Arabian peninsula. This regal-looking mammal features heavily in Arabic poetry and paintings. Locally known as Al Maha, the Arabian Oryx is uniquely adapted to living in extremely arid environments.

- Its wide hooves enable it to walk easily across the shifting sand
- It can smell water from miles away
- It lives in small herds of eight to 10 animals, which is believed to reduce stress in individuals in the harsh desert ecosystem
- This species tends to seek the shade and often feeds at dusk, detecting and rooting up succulent tubers buried up to half a metre underground.

DID YOU KNOW?

When viewed in profile the two horns of the Arabian Oryx may appear as one, and as such this species is widely believed to be the source of the unicorn legend. However, the origins of the unicorn tale are also attributed to another antelope species, the [Saola](#) (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) from Southeast Asia.



© Dena Cator

The Arabian Oryx does not have many natural predators, but one particular species nearly drove it to extinction: man. Uncontrolled hunting led to the Arabian Oryx, which once had a wide distribution across Arabia, becoming Extinct in the Wild; it is believed that the last remaining wild individual was shot in Oman in 1972. As the extent of the decline became apparent, some of the last animals were captured to form a 'World Herd' which, along with individuals from royal collections in Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, provided stock for re-introductions into the wild.

RE-INTRODUCTIONS

The first re-introduction occurred in Oman in 1982 and was a success, demonstrating the ability of captive oryx to adapt to the harsh wild conditions. Subsequent re-introductions have taken place in Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and, most recently, in Jordan.



As a result of the re-introduction programmes, the current wild population now stands at approximately 1,000 individuals. Several reassessments of the status of this species have taken place since the start of the re-introductions, and in 2011 the species finally qualified for a move from Endangered to Vulnerable. This is the first time that a species which was once Extinct in the Wild has improved in status by three full categories on the IUCN Red List.

An Arabian Oryx Regional Conservation Strategy Workshop was held in August 2007, sponsored by the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), to develop a conservation strategy setting out a coordinated programme to further improve the status of this magnificent species.

For more details on the Arabian Oryx and to search for information about more than 59,000 other species, please visit www.iucnredlist.org.

Related links:

[SSC Antelope Specialist Group](#)

[The Arabian Oryx on ARKive](#)

[Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi](#)