COUNTRY BRIEF

# NIGER

AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

KEEP NATURE STANDING

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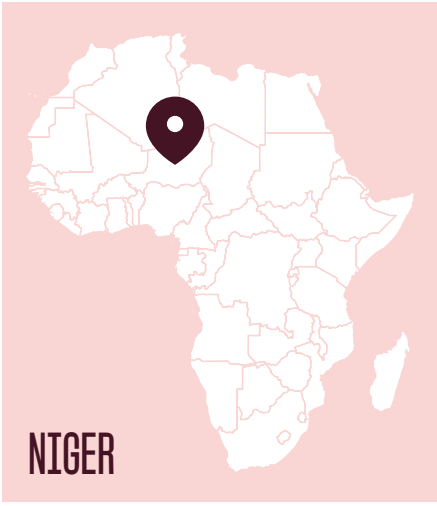
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Niger boasts a diverse and unique natural heritage, home to several iconic and threatened Saharan species such as the Addax antelope (*Addax nasomaculatus*), West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*), Dorcas gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*), Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), and Dama gazelle (*Nanger dama*). These species play crucial ecological roles and are vital symbols of the country's biodiversity. However, Niger's biodiversity is under increasing pressure, with population declines reaching critical levels due to a combination of ecological, socio-economic, and security-related challenges.




One of the primary concerns is habitat degradation which remains a principal driver of biodiversity loss in Niger. Overgrazing by livestock, widespread deforestation for fuelwood and agriculture, and unsustainable land-use practices are diminishing suitable habitats and fragmenting wildlife populations. Expanding human settlements, mining, and agricultural frontiers encroach into previously undisturbed areas, leaving wildlife with shrinking spaces to survive and thrive. Poaching and illegal hunting further exacerbate the problem. Species are hunted for bushmeat, traditional use, or the illicit wildlife trade, undermining population recovery efforts. Human-wildlife conflict has also intensified, particularly in zones where large carnivores or herbivores interact with rural communities over limited water and grazing resources. Such interactions often result in retaliatory killings of wildlife, especially when livelihoods are threatened. Compounding these ecological challenges are persistent security issues in several parts of the country. Political instability and the presence of extremist groups limit access to critical conservation areas, endanger field teams, and obstruct the implementation and monitoring of conservation programmes. These risks create significant gaps in enforcement and surveillance, allowing illegal activities to go unchecked in some of Niger's most sensitive ecosystems.

> Niger's biodiversity is under increasing pressure, with population declines reaching critical levels due to a combination of ecological, socio-economic, and security-related challenges.

In response to these challenges, the IUCN SOS Africa Wildlife Initiative funded and implemented **six conservation projects** in Niger, focusing on species recovery, habitat protection, and community engagement. One major area of intervention has been the conservation of the Addax antelope in the Termit Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve. This effort involved stabilising and monitoring populations through community-based monitoring programmes and territorial surveillance measures. Similarly, giraffe conservation has been a priority, with initiatives aimed at increasing the population of the West African giraffe. These efforts involved translocation programmes, continuous monitoring, education campaigns, and community awareness initiatives, alongside habitat restoration to ensure the species' long-term survival.

To address the issue of human-wildlife conflict, the IUCN SOS Africa Wildlife Initiative funded projects have played a crucial role in mitigating conflicts between communities and large carnivores around the W National Park. Through active community engagement, alternative livelihood

programmes, and conflict mitigation strategies, these projects have helped foster co-existence between people and wildlife. Additionally, support was provided to improve the status of the Dorcas gazelle, Barbary sheep, and Dama gazelle in the Aïr and Ténéré National Nature Reserves. This initiative integrates capacity building, community participation, and technological advancements to enhance conservation outcomes.

To sustain and enhance these conservation efforts, several strategic actions are recommended. These include:

- Empower local communities as stewards of biodiversity by enhancing their participation in decision-making, management, and benefit-sharing. Initiatives should invest in training, equip local ranger networks, and promote community conservancies that balance ecological goals with socio-economic needs.
- Collaborate with national authorities, local leaders, and international partners to establish protocols for conservation work in high-risk areas. This could include providing security training for field staff, developing remote monitoring tools, and creating contingency plans for protected area management during periods of instability.
- Adopt and scale up the use of tools such as GPS telemetry, drone surveillance, SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool), and camera traps to monitor species movements, detect illegal activities, and inform adaptive management in real time.
- Introduce and expand alternative income-generating activities, such as eco-tourism, beekeeping, handicrafts, and sustainable agriculture, to reduce dependency on natural resources. Support access to markets, microfinance, and capacity-building to ensure these livelihoods are economically viable.
- Establish standardised frameworks to track conservation progress, assess ecological and social impacts, and enable adaptive management. This will ensure conservation strategies remain responsive to emerging challenges and grounded in evidence-based decision-making.
- Foster greater collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, research institutions, local communities, and international organisations. Strong partnerships help leverage resources, build technical capacity, and ensure long-term institutional and financial support for conservation efforts.
- Prioritise the implementation of strategic frameworks such as the *National Giraffe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for Niger*. Alignment with national priorities ensures coherence, legitimacy, and sustained policy and funding support.

By adopting and integrating these recommendations, Niger can build on current progress to further strengthen its conservation initiatives. A strategic, inclusive, and well-coordinated approach will not only help safeguard the country's rich biodiversity but also support the resilience and prosperity of communities whose livelihoods are closely tied to the health of natural ecosystems.

“By adopting and integrating these recommendations, Niger can build on current progress to further strengthen its conservation initiative.”

# THE IUCN SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE: SCALING CONSERVATION ACTION FOR THREATENED SPECIES

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) envisions "a just world that values and conserves nature." Its mission is to "influence, encourage, and assist societies worldwide to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable." As a global authority on biodiversity conservation, IUCN operates through an extensive network of over 10,000 species conservation experts who guide the development and implementation of its strategy. Through initiatives like Save Our Species (SOS), IUCN supports evidence-based conservation action, strengthens civil society organisations (CSOs), and helps implement biodiversity policies that benefit species, ecosystems, and people.

Photo credit: © COGEZOH

Africa is home to some of the world's most iconic yet increasingly threatened species, particularly large carnivores such as lions, cheetahs, leopards, African wild dogs, and Ethiopian wolves. These species face escalating threats due to habitat loss, poaching, human-wildlife conflict, and illegal wildlife trade. To address these challenges, the IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative was launched as a partnership between the European Union and IUCN. The initiative focuses on two primary objectives: strengthening CSOs working to protect biodiversity, species, and habitats and demonstrating the impact of conservation actions on threatened species and ecosystems, with a special focus on large carnivores.

The initiative operates through three core pillars.

- **Species conservation**, which involves monitoring and protecting wildlife populations while creating conditions for species to recover and recolonise their native habitats.

- **Habitat protection** that enhances protected area management, restores degraded ecosystems and tackles threats such as overgrazing and invasive species.
- **Community engagement** which ensures the participation of local communities in conservation action. Supporting communities to adopt alternative livelihoods like beekeeping, agroforestry, and ecotourism reduces communities' reliance on natural resources, while the promotion of coexistence measures supports the needs of those living near wildlife.

To achieve these goals, the initiative funds conservation actions that address human-wildlife conflict through community-based interventions, awareness campaigns, and compensation schemes. It also combats poaching and illegal wildlife trade via anti-poaching patrols, snare removal, and K9 detection units. Additionally, the initiative supports habitat restoration through afforestation, wildfire management, and sustainable pasture planning while strengthening law enforcement and policy advocacy to enhance species protection. Recognising the importance of local participation, it actively involves communities through capacity-building programmes, conservation employment opportunities, and education initiatives.

Since its launch, the initiative has provided funding through three calls for proposals (2017, 2019, and 2021), offering two types of grants. Threatened Species Grants support long-term projects implementing a programmatic approach to addressing critical conservation threats, with funding ranging from €25,000 to €450,000 per grant and Rapid Action Grants offering short-term emergency response funding between €25,000 and €100,000 per grant. These grants have been instrumental in driving conservation action across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative awarded 91 grants totalling €10.8 million to 91 civil society organisations, with 70% of grantees being national organisations. As a result:

- Approximately **40 million hectares** of key wildlife habitats have been placed under improved management.
- **37 action plans** have been developed or improved for better species protection.
- Additionally, **30 projects** have mitigated human-wildlife conflict, fostering coexistence between wildlife and communities.
- Capacity-building efforts have trained **44,510 people** through workshops and policy events with **665,665 individuals** benefiting from direct employment and livelihood activities.
- **85% of grantees** reported improved organisational capacity, thereby strengthening conservation efforts across Africa.

The initiative has also helped amplify conservation awareness amongst the general public, with over **1,200 conservation stories** published across various platforms.

> The IUCN SOS African Wildlife Initiative strengthens civil society, protects threatened species and habitats, and empowers communities—placing 40 million hectares under improved management and reaching over 665,000 people through conservation-based livelihoods.

# NIGER IN FOCUS

Niger, located in West Africa, is a landlocked country characterised by its vast Sahara Desert landscapes and rich biodiversity. The nation's economy heavily relies on its natural resources, with a focus on subsistence agriculture and livestock. Niger is home to several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, notably the Aïr and Ténéré Natural Reserves. These reserves are part of the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Complex, representing the largest sequence of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the West African savannah. Key protected areas include the Gadabedji Reserve, established in 1955 and covering 760 $Km^2$ in central Niger, which was recognised as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 2017. Another critical site

Photo credit: © John Newby

is the Termit Massif Reserve, located in southeastern Niger, spanning approximately 86,215 km². Designated as a national nature and cultural reserve in 2012, it encompasses the entire Termit Massif and Tin Toumma desert, making it Africa's largest protected area.

The country's diverse ecosystems support over 1,400 plant species, around 130 mammal species, and more than 150 reptiles and amphibians. Niger's avifauna includes 528 bird species, with 15 considered globally threatened. A notable threatened species is the Dama gazelle, with fewer than 300 individuals remaining in the wild, classifying it as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Despite these rich natural resources, Niger faces significant conservation challenges. The Sahara Desert covers about 65% of the country, presenting harsh conditions that hinder the survival of native species. Over the decades, biodiversity degradation has accelerated due to factors such as poaching, habitat loss, over-exploitation of resources, and human activities.

To address these challenges, the IUCN Save Our Species African Wildlife initiative has played a crucial role in supporting science-based conservation actions in Niger, to protect threatened species and their habitats. The IUCN SOS African Wildlife initiative has awarded a total of **€733,198** through six grants to five civil society organisations (CSOs) in Niger. These efforts have led to the following outcomes;

1. **5.9 million hectares** of important wildlife habitats have been placed under improved management. three new policies have been implemented to enhance species protection mostly focusing on developing action plans for species conservation and influencing government policies for better species protection.
2. Two projects have also addressed human-wildlife conflict, promoting coexistence between wildlife and local communities.
3. Capacity-building efforts have trained **244 individuals** through workshops and policy events, benefiting a total of **13,657 people** involved in conservation and livelihood activities.

Niger's unique blend of desert and savannah ecosystems hosts a wealth of biodiversity. Ongoing conservation efforts are essential to safeguard this natural heritage for future generations.

**Over**
**1,400**
**plant species**

**Around**
**130**
**mammal species**

**More than**
**150**
**reptiles and amphibians**

**528**
**bird species**

# SOS AFRICAN WILDLIFE INITIATIVE ON THE GROUND ACTIONS IN NIGER

### 3.1 Preservation of the last wild population of addax in the world (2020 – 2022)

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|---|---|
| Implementation partner | Noé |
| Target species | Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*) Critically Endangered |
| Project location | National Nature Reserve of Termit and Tin-Toumma (RNNTT) |

## PROBLEM

The addax population faces multiple threats, including habitat degradation, poaching, and security concerns. Industrial activities such as oil extraction, along with climate change, have fragmented the species' habitat. Opportunistic hunting continues to pose a significant challenge, while political instability and the presence of armed groups further complicate conservation efforts. Additionally, in Chad, the lack of data remains a concern, as no direct or indirect sightings have been recorded since 2010, despite anecdotal evidence suggesting a sporadic presence. Logistical challenges also hinder monitoring, as the vast and harsh desert environment, covering 37,000 km², makes traditional methods like aerial surveys difficult. The project encountered further setbacks, including the cancellation of aerial surveys due to COVID-19 and security risks. Technical failures with drones caused by extreme weather conditions added another layer of difficulty to conservation efforts.

## APPROACH

Community-based monitoring was introduced, where local agents used camels (méharis) for surveillance and data collection. This low-cost method proved effective in navigating the harsh desert terrain. Territorial surveillance was strengthened through collaboration with Niger's National Nature Reserve of Termit and Tin-Toumma (RNNTT), ensuring the permanent deployment of monitoring agents.

Community engagement played a crucial role in the conservation efforts. Contracts with local communities, consultation committees, and awareness campaigns emphasised the importance of protecting the addax. For instance, a "terroir contract" was signed with communities at Sountel well, and three regional prefects mobilised local leaders to advocate for conservation measures. The project also employed an adaptive management approach, allowing activities to be adjusted iteratively in response to external constraints such as security threats and logistical delays.

## KEY OUTCOMES

The project successfully identified up to four sub-groups of addaxes within Niger, with precise locations for three of them. Two groups were found within or near RNNTT territory, while one was located near the border with Chad. Population stabilisation was another significant achievement, with a small but steady number of individuals. Encouragingly, observations of juveniles indicated ongoing reproduction, with one juvenile recorded in 2020, six in 2021 (three near the border and three in Tin-Toumma), and two in 2022 in Tin-Toumma.

Additionally, no recent poaching cases were recorded after the initial incidents that occurred in the first six months of implementation (May–November 2020). The project also enhanced community-based conservation capacity by recruiting local agents, with seven deployed in Niger and up to four in Chad.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Several factors contributed to the project's success.

- Community involvement was critical, as local agents ensured effective monitoring despite security challenges.
- Méhari patrols proved to be a sustainable alternative to traditional aerial surveys.
- Collaborative efforts with RNNTT and local communities provided essential institutional support and facilitated surveillance operations.
- The project's adaptability allowed for iterative management, enabling adjustments to methodologies in response to logistical and political constraints.

### 3.2 Project to secure the habitat of large carnivores' prey in the W National Park (2020 – 2022)

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|---|---|
| Implementation partner | Contribution à la Gestion des Zones Humides (COGEZOH) |
| Target species | ▪ Lion (*Panthera leo*) Vulnerable<br>▪ Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) Vulnerable<br>▪ Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*) Least Concern<br>▪ Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) Vulnerable |
| Project location | W National Park |

## PROBLEM

Human- wildlife conflict (HWC) presents a significant threat to large carnivores in the area. This conflict mainly arises from livestock predation, which leads to retaliatory killings of the carnivores, and from unsustainable resource use by local communities, such as illegal harvesting of baobab leaves and fodder within the park. The situation was further complicated by security issues, including a large-scale terrorist attack within Parc W, which resulted in the death of two forest rangers and the kidnapping of the COGEZOH field coordinator, who remains missing. This attack made the interior of the protected area inaccessible, severely impacting conservation efforts.

## APPROACH

To address these challenges, the project implemented several strategies aimed at mitigating HWC and promoting coexistence. Community engagement was central to the approach, focusing on fostering relationships between local communities and park management through participatory problem identification and collaborative solutions. The project also introduced alternative livelihoods to reduce the community's reliance on park resources. This included beekeeping, baobab leaf cultivation in nurseries, and fodder production for livestock, with a specific focus on vulnerable groups such as women and youth.

Conflict mitigation strategies were employed to prevent livestock predation, including the construction of livestock enclosures (Bomas) and the employment of herders to protect livestock during grazing. Additionally, the project conducted awareness and education campaigns to inform communities about HWC, its causes, and the importance of coexistence with wildlife.

An early warning system was also established, consisting of a network of local informants equipped with data collection tools to monitor and report potential conflicts, which allowed for rapid response and intervention. A total of 200 individuals were trained in conflict management. Furthermore, the project created a database to track HWC trends, helping to inform management decisions and providing insights into conflict hotspots and effective mitigation strategies.

Photo credit: © Roland Meresse

## KEY OUTCOMES

The project successfully reduced human-wildlife conflict through concrete actions and an increased understanding of the issues, particularly minimising conflicts related to livestock losses due to predation. The livelihoods of 499 direct beneficiaries, including women and youth, improved as they continued to harvest baobab leaves and honey and grow fodder. Approximately 4,500 people across 20 villages indirectly benefited from these activities.

The project also produced tangible outputs: 3,202 litters of honey, 5,791 kg of baobab leaves, and 7,080 kg *of Echinochloa stagnina* fodder. Community involvement grew as more people independently engaged in alternative livelihood activities, demonstrating the sustainability of the project. The strategies used in the project were adopted by other stakeholders, such as establishing local informant networks, and the "Bomas" became an integral part of livestock management in the area. In addition, the Niger's Protected Areas Directorate has shown interest in replicating the approach in other protected areas, indicating the project's potential for scaling up.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Several factors contributed to the success of the project.

- The participatory design, which involved local communities in identifying real problems, ensured that the project was relevant and fostered ownership among community members.
- The project's diverse thematic approach, which addressed multiple aspects of HWC and livelihood improvement, created a holistic and effective solution.
- Its flexibility and adaptive management allowed for adjustments in response to security challenges and changes in the environment, ensuring continued success despite unforeseen circumstances.
- Regular monitoring and reporting provided valuable feedback, helping to correct the approach and ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

### 3.3 Planning to save the last wild addax (2019 – 2020)

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| Implementation partner | Marwell Wildlife |
| Target species | Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*) Critically Endangered |
| Project location | Termit Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve |

## PROBLEM

The Critically Endangered addax, once widespread across the Sahara, has been reduced to an estimated 30–50 individuals in the wild, concentrated in Niger. This decline has been driven by illegal hunting and habitat destruction linked to oil exploration activities over the last decade. In June 2019, a key protected area for the species was declassified to facilitate oil extraction, leaving the addax without protection. DNA analysis reveals that this remaining wild population holds significant genetic diversity not found in global captive populations, making its preservation crucial for long-term conservation efforts.

Photo credit: © GCF

## APPROACH

An urgent mission was conducted to Niamey by the project team, IUCN experts and stakeholders to consult with the Niger government and other key actors on designing an emergency programme to protect the remaining wild addax population. During this mission, the team engaged with key stakeholders, including the government of Niger, particularly the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Petroleum, and Ministry of the Interior,

to address the critical situation of the wild addax population and the changes to the reserve's boundaries. Following this, recommendations were developed for immediate conservation measures, and a roadmap was created for global conservation efforts.

The project also ensured that the findings and recommendations were communicated broadly, including translation of the mission report into Chinese to engage with the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

## KEY OUTCOMES

An emergency programme was developed to protect the last wild addax population in Niger, which included actionable recommendations for safeguarding their habitat and addressing threats such as illegal hunting. Additionally, a global conservation roadmap was established to reintegrate addax into their historical range through reintroduction initiatives. This roadmap emphasised meta-population management across multiple countries, highlighting the plight of desert ecosystems as a broader conservation issue and drawing international attention. To facilitate engagement with CNPC, the report was also translated into Chinese.

The project successfully engaged with the government of Niger on the critical situation of the addax and received acceptance for the mission's recommendations. Furthermore, technical advice was provided to CMS for a funding application to the German government (BMU), which was a significant step toward securing resources for addax conservation. The project's efforts were publicly recognised with features on the IUCN Crossroads blog in English, French, and Chinese, raising awareness and garnering additional support for the cause.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The success of these conservation efforts was contingent upon several key factors.

- Strong political commitment from Niger's government was crucial in reinstating protected areas and enforcing anti-poaching laws effectively.
- Transboundary cooperation between Niger and Chad was also essential for protecting migratory populations, supported by partnerships with NGOs such as Sahara Conservation Fund and Noé Conservation, which provided expertise in ecological monitoring and advocacy.
- The engagement of the private sector, particularly the China National Petroleum Corporation company operating in overlapping habitats, was vital as they adopted sensitive practices and contributed to conservation efforts by minimising disturbance and supporting protective measures.

### 3.4 Saving West Africa's last giraffe: increasing conservation, management and range in support of the Niger National Strategy (2018 – 2020)

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|---|---|
| Implementation partner | Giraffe Conservation Foundation |
| Target species | West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) Vulnerable |
| Project location | Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve |

## PROBLEM

The West African giraffe is one of the most threatened large mammals in the world, with a population of around 600 individuals when the project began. The primary objective of the project was to improve the conservation status of the giraffe and other threatened species within the giraffe's range in Niger. The giraffe population was limited to the "Giraffe Zone," and there was a pressing need to expand their range and increase their numbers. However, translocation efforts faced significant challenges, particularly related to security, which required a high military and police presence, complicating logistical planning. Additionally, the IUCN SSC Giraffe and Okapi Specialist Group had been inactive, resulting in a lack of updated data on the giraffe population's status.

## APPROACH

The project implemented a series of targeted conservation measures to increase the giraffe's range and numbers. Initially, the plan was to translocate eight giraffes from the 'Giraffe Zone' to the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve, but due to security concerns, the number was reduced to four, and the government recommended a single trip for the translocation rather than the planned two. Continuous monitoring of giraffe populations in both the Giraffe Zone and the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve was carried out, incorporating new and more precise monitoring techniques.

Educational initiatives targeting over 1,000 students were implemented to increase awareness and garner support for giraffe conservation. Additionally, awareness campaigns were launched to enhance the protection of both the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve and the 'Giraffe Zone.' To support these efforts, training was provided to rangers and eco-guards in monitoring, data entry, and analysis, with 25 training events held.

## KEY OUTCOMES

The giraffe population within the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve grew significantly, with the first-ever births in the reserve. Prior to the reintroduction, the reserve was home to eight West African giraffes, and following the translocation efforts, four more giraffes were added. With the addition of new births, the reserve now hosts 15 giraffes, including three calves, and two additional giraffes are currently pregnant. The

global population of West African giraffes also saw a 15% increase over the four-year duration of the project, growing from around 600 to approximately 690 individuals.

In addition to the West African giraffe efforts, the project facilitated the successful reintroduction of the threatened North African or red-necked giraffe into the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve. Training efforts led to at least twenty (20) rangers and six (6) eco-guards being trained in the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve. Furthermore, in 2018, the West African giraffe was downlisted from "Endangered" to "Vulnerable" by the IUCN SSC Giraffe & Okapi Specialist Group. The capacity of the local team in Niger, as well as local wildlife authorities and NGOs, was also significantly built, cementing the role of the GCF as a leader in giraffe conservation in the region.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The project's success was driven by several key factors.

- The strategic implementation of targeted conservation measures, including translocation, monitoring, education, and awareness programs, played a significant role in its achievements.
- Continuous monitoring efforts by a dedicated team ensured the giraffe populations were regularly assessed and protected.
- Collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and other organisations was crucial in facilitating the project's success, ensuring wide support and resources.
- Community support was essential, as education and awareness programmes helped to ensure the protection of both the Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve and the 'Giraffe Zone,' fostering local engagement in conservation efforts.

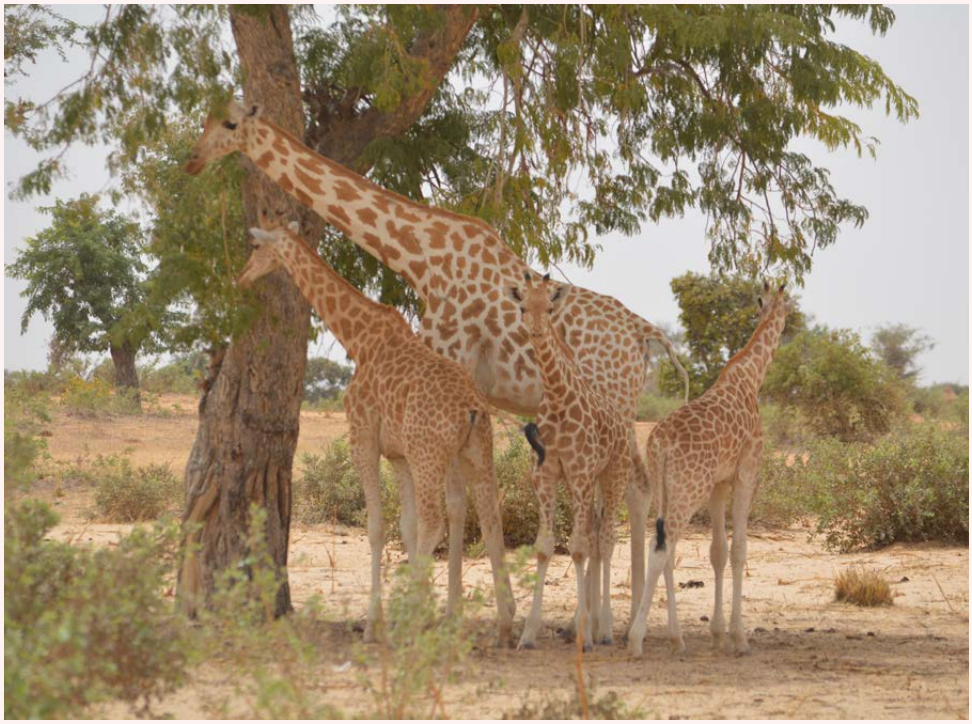

Photo credit: © GCF

### 3.5 Support for the conservation of the last populations of West African giraffe and their habitat in the rural communities of Harikanassou and Kouré (2021 – 2023)

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|---|---|
| Implementation partner | *Contribution à la Gestion des Zones Humides* (COGEZOH) |
| Target species | West African giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) Vulnerable |
| Project location | Harikanassou and Kouré Communities |

## PROBLEM

The project focuses on conserving the last remaining populations of giraffes in West Africa, particularly within the rural communes of Harikanassou and Kouré, Niger. The primary challenges include threats to giraffe habitats and the need for local community involvement in conservation efforts. To address these issues, the project aimed to improve local knowledge about giraffes, raise awareness about the importance of preserving the vegetation that giraffes depend on, and establish effective monitoring systems for giraffe populations.

## APPROACH

The project adopted a multi-faceted approach to conservation, which included various components aimed at addressing the identified challenges. One of the key strategies was environmental education, which involved organising school excursions to observe giraffes, developing and distributing educational materials, and training teachers to effectively use these resources. Habitat restoration was also a significant part of the approach, focusing on the production, planting, and maintenance

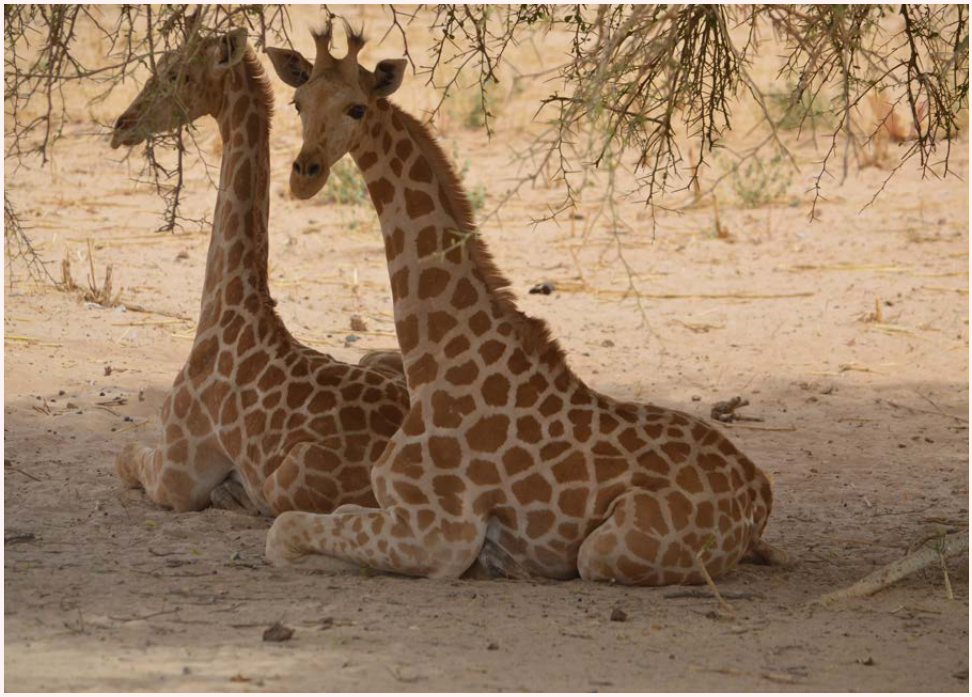

Photo credit: © GCF

of Acacia seedlings, as well as promoting Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) techniques among farmers. Community engagement was central to the project, with efforts to sensitise local authorities, administrative bodies, and communities on the importance of giraffe conservation and addressing issues such as human-wildlife conflict, particularly damage caused by giraffes to crops. Additionally, the project implemented a population monitoring system, utilising photo-monitoring to track giraffe numbers, creating photo albums for identification, and systematically recording giraffe-related incidents.

## KEY OUTCOMES

The project achieved several key outcomes that contributed significantly to giraffe conservation efforts. Over 6,800 students and teachers participated in school excursions, which enhanced their understanding of giraffes and their ecological importance. A total of 10,000 copies of an educational manual on giraffe ecology were distributed to schools, and 200 teachers were trained on how to effectively use the manual in their classrooms. Habitat preservation was also a major success, with 15,000 Acacia seedlings planted, involving both local communities and school children in the process. RNA techniques were implemented across 150 hectares. The project also succeeded in raising awareness, as local authorities and communities were sensitised to the importance of giraffe conservation. Through systematic population monitoring via photo-identification, giraffe numbers increased from 194 in 2021 to 335 in 2023. Additionally, giraffe-related incidents, particularly crop damage, were systematically recorded, with 418 cases documented over 22 months.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Several factors contributed to the success of the project.

- Community involvement played a crucial role, with local communities, schools, and authorities actively engaged in conservation efforts.
- Educational initiatives, such as school excursions and teacher training, were particularly effective in increasing awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility towards giraffe conservation.
- Collaboration with local authorities, the National Wildlife Department, and other conservation projects, such as AdaptWap, further enhanced the impact of the project.
- The implementation of practical solutions, like seedling planting and RNA promotion, provided tangible ways to address habitat degradation and ensure the long-term survival of giraffes in the region.

### 3.6 Reversing the decline of threatened Saharan wildlife in the Aïr and Ténéré National Nature Reserve (2021 – 2024)

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|---|---|
| Implementation partner | Sahara Conservation Fund |
| Target species | ▪ Dorcas gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*) Vulnerable<br>▪ Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*) Vulnerable<br>▪ Dama gazelle (*Nanger dama*) Critically Endangered |
| Project location | Aïr and Ténéré National Nature Reserve |

**PROBLEM**

The Aïr and Ténéré National Nature Reserve (ATNNR) faces critical conservation challenges, including declining populations of threatened species due to habitat degradation, competition with livestock, and persistent poaching. The Protected Area Management Unit (PAMU) struggled with limited capacity and resources, making effective monitoring and enforcement difficult. Additionally, the lack of community involvement in conservation efforts further exacerbated the threats to biodiversity, creating a complex mix of ecological and socio-economic pressures.

**APPROACH**

The project employed a multidimensional strategy to address these challenges. Capacity-building efforts focused on training all 17 PAMU agents in SMART monitoring techniques and equipping them with essential gear, such as patrol boots and camping beds, to enhance their surveillance capabilities. Community engagement was a key component, with the employment of four community guards to support monitoring and awareness efforts, occasionally collaborating with the Park Management Unit (PAMU) on surveillance missions. Additionally, 60 vaccinated, dewormed, and tagged goats were distributed to vulnerable households, and itinerant health missions were conducted. Technological integration played a crucial role, with the deployment of 40 camera traps for systematic wildlife monitoring, particularly in known Dama gazelle distribution areas. A strategic conservation roadmap for the Dama gazelle was also developed through stakeholder meetings and participatory processes, fostering a collaborative approach to conservation planning.

**KEY OUTCOMES**

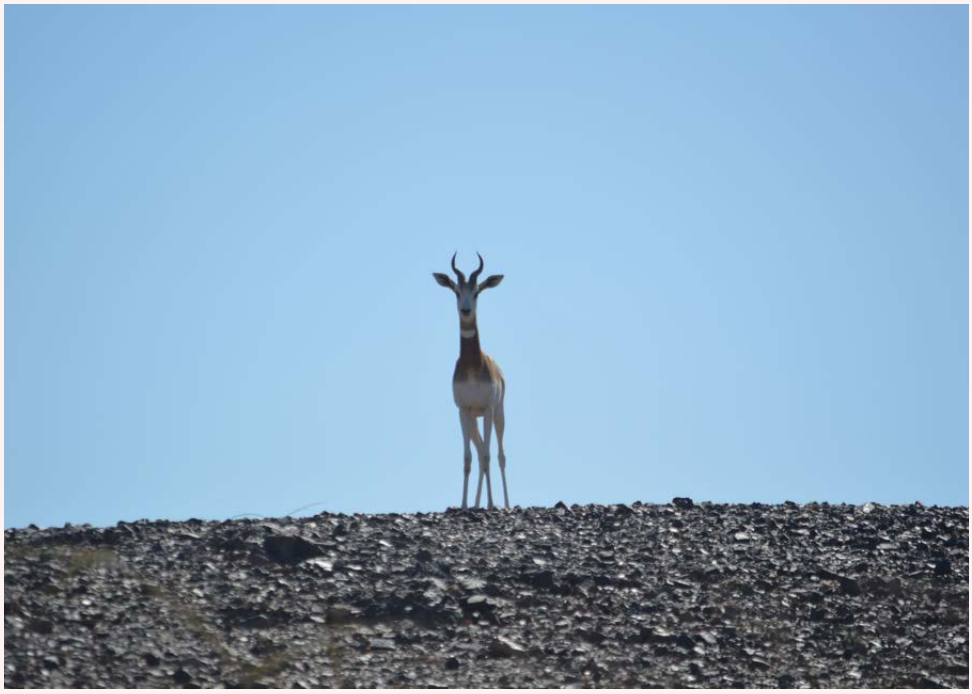
The deployment of 40 camera traps provided valuable data on wildlife distribution, threats, and population estimates, with 20–30 Dama gazelles identified. A total of 17 patrols covering over 8,500 km were completed, enhancing protection against illegal activities, including five extended 10-day patrols covering 2,459 km in the latter half of the project. The distribution of 60 goats to vulnerable households was closely monitored, with herd numbers increasing to 85 goats, enabling eight additional

families to receive young goats. Additionally, five health missions were conducted, benefiting 692 people, with itineraries adapted to the needs of the communities, considering their dispersal and seasonal challenges.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Several factors contributed to the project's success.

- Strong collaboration with local authorities and communities ensured broad support for conservation efforts.
- The effective use of technology, including camera traps and SMART monitoring, significantly improved data collection and analysis.
- Capacity-building initiatives empowered PAMU agents and community guards, enhancing their ability to carry out conservation activities effectively. Furthermore,
- An extension granted at no additional cost during the previous period allowed the team to continue its efforts through the first semester of 2024, which was instrumental in achieving the project's objectives.



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# 4

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM CONSERVATION ACTIONS IN NIGER

## 4. 1 Community-based approaches in conflict zones

Conservation efforts in politically unstable regions, such as the Sahelo-Saharan region, have demonstrated that traditional surveillance methods, including aerial surveys and vehicle patrols, are not always feasible due to security risks. These risks, coupled with vast and remote landscapes, make it difficult to implement conventional monitoring techniques. In response, community-based monitoring has emerged as a resilient, cost-effective, and sustainable alternative. By employing local agents on camel patrols (méharis), conservationists have successfully tracked species, conducted habitat surveillance, and prevented poaching. The use of local knowledge and engagement of community members has strengthened conservation efforts, ensuring continuous presence in critical areas while fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among the local population.

“The use of local knowledge and engagement of community members has strengthened conservation efforts.”

The importance and success of these community-based approaches are echoed in the lived experiences of those on the ground:

*“The involvement of community agents was the only viable solution for monitoring addax populations under such challenging conditions,”* one grantee shared. These agents have become the backbone of conservation efforts, ensuring that endangered species are protected amidst adversity.

*“The absence of poaching incidents over recent months demonstrates the effectiveness of our combined surveillance measures,”* another grantee noted, highlighting the critical role of coordination between rangers, community agents, and local stakeholders.

A livestock breeder from the Bomas project added, *“The Bomas project has transformed livestock security in our community. We no longer fear losing our cattle to predators.”*

## 4.2 Long-term engagement improves conservation outcomes

Sustainable conservation initiatives thrive when local communities are actively involved in decision-making and management. Projects that prioritise community ownership and participatory approaches have consistently achieved greater success in securing local support for conservation. In the COGEZOH project, herders and farmers played a direct role in identifying and implementing solutions for human-wildlife conflict, leading to increased community buy-in and compliance with mitigation measures. One of the key strategies employed was the use of "terroir contracts"—formal agreements between conservation teams and local communities that outline commitments to biodiversity protection. These agreements have provided a structured framework for conservation efforts, strengthening accountability and reinforcing a cooperative approach to wildlife protection.

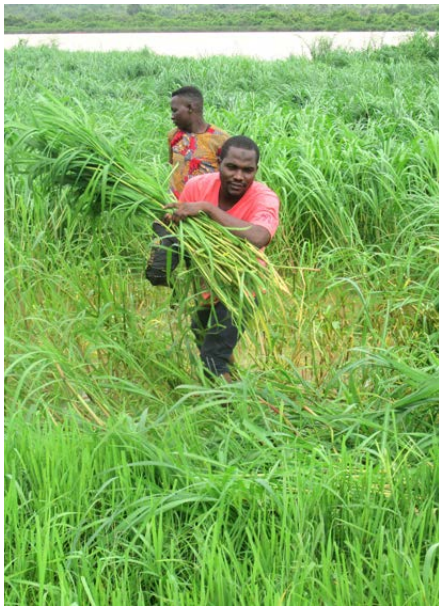


Photo credit: © COGEZOH

The transformative impact of community involvement is seen in regions such as Niger's 'Giraffe Zone' and Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve:

*"By implementing targeted conservation measures such as translocation and monitoring, combined with educational initiatives, we have successfully enhanced the overall conservation status of giraffes,"* a grantee explains. Once reduced to just 49 individuals in the 1990s, West African giraffes now thrive in greater numbers, thanks to locally motivated interventions.

## 4.3 Adaptive management is critical in unpredictable environments

Conservation projects operating in regions with political instability, security threats, and logistical challenges must remain flexible and responsive. The ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges has been a defining characteristic of successful conservation efforts. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, fieldwork and aerial surveys were delayed, requiring teams to develop alternative monitoring strategies. Similarly, extreme desert conditions led to frequent technical failures of drones and monitoring equipment, necessitating the adoption of more robust, weather-resistant technologies. Furthermore, unexpected security threats, such as terrorist attacks in protected areas, required immediate adjustments to conservation strategies, including relocating operations or strengthening local surveillance networks. These experiences underscore the importance of maintaining an adaptive management approach that allows for iterative planning and real-time problem-solving.

## 4.4 Providing alternative livelihoods reduces human-wildlife conflict

Reducing pressure on wildlife and protected habitats requires addressing the economic realities of local communities. One of the most effective strategies in this regard has been the promotion of alternative livelihood programmes that provide viable economic opportunities

while conserving natural resources. Initiatives such as beekeeping and honey production, which generate income while maintaining ecological balance. Additionally, baobab leaf cultivation and sustainable fodder production have helped communities shift away from illegal harvesting inside protected areas. These livelihood programmes not only improve economic stability for local populations but also minimise human-wildlife conflict by decreasing competition for resources.

## 4.5 Multi-stakeholder collaboration strengthens conservation impact

The success of conservation projects is often amplified through collaboration with various stakeholders, including government agencies, conservation organisations, local communities, and research institutions. When these groups work together, conservation efforts become more comprehensive, well-funded, and sustainable. For example, Niger's Protected Areas Directorate played a crucial role in the COGEZOH project, facilitating the expansion of conservation initiatives to other protected areas. Similarly, conservation roadmaps for species such as the addax and Dama gazelle were co-designed with national and international partners, ensuring broad-based support and funding. Participation in regional and global conservation forums, such as the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group meetings, further strengthened the project's impact by securing additional resources and fostering knowledge-sharing among conservation practitioners.

"The success of conservation projects is often amplified through collaboration with various stakeholders."

The value of such partnerships is emphasised by those directly engaged:

*"This project has increased the visibility of our organisation among local and national partners,"* a grantee noted. *"It has positioned us as a key player in managing human-wildlife conflict in Niger."*

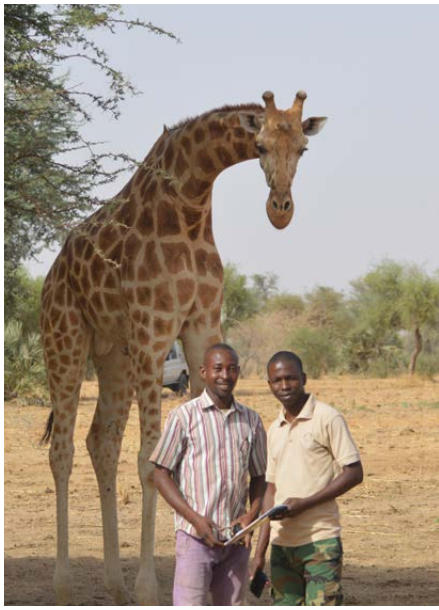
## 4.6 Monitoring and data collection for conservation success

Long-term conservation success depends on consistent and reliable data collection to assess species populations, habitat conditions, and threats. In many conservation projects, a lack of continuous data has made it difficult to measure progress and refine intervention strategies. Effective monitoring techniques have included the use of camera traps, which provide valuable insights into species distribution, behaviour, and threats such as poaching. Photo-identification methods have been instrumental in estimating precise population sizes and tracking individual animals. Additionally, community-led early warning networks have played a critical role in real-time monitoring of human-wildlife conflict incidents, enabling rapid responses to emerging threats. Strengthening these data collection efforts ensures that conservation strategies remain evidence-based and adaptable to changing environmental and socio-political conditions.

These narratives illustrate how conservation efforts are not just about saving species—they are about empowering communities, fostering collaboration, and creating sustainable futures for both people and nature.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SPECIES CONSERVATION EFFORTS

- To strengthen conservation outcomes, it is recommended to **expand community-based monitoring programmes** by training more local conservation agents and formalising community stewardship agreements, thereby increasing grassroots involvement in wildlife protection.
- **Investing in robust, field-appropriate technology**—such as weather-resistant drones, camera traps, and mobile data collection platforms—can enable real-time monitoring and improve data accuracy.
- **Enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships** is also essential; this includes facilitating cross-border initiatives and engaging private sector actors to bolster financial and logistical support.
- To safeguard efforts during periods of unrest, **developing contingency plans** for political instability and security threats—such as risk management frameworks and remote monitoring strategies—is crucial.
- Additionally, **scaling up sustainable livelihood programmes**, including beekeeping, sustainable agriculture, and ecotourism, can help reduce local reliance on unsustainable resource use.
- Finally, **improving legislative frameworks** and advocating for stronger species protection laws, alongside long-term government funding, will ensure more durable policy support for conservation efforts.



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# CONCLUSION

Despite numerous challenges, conservation efforts in Niger have yielded significant positive outcomes. The stabilisation of addax populations, effective human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and the expansion of alternative livelihood programmes demonstrate that community-driven conservation models are both viable and sustainable.

Looking ahead, continued investment in community engagement, technological advancements, policy support, and sustainable livelihoods will be essential to ensuring the long-term survival of critically endangered species. Strengthening partnerships among governments, NGOs, and local stakeholders will further enhance conservation impact, creating lasting ecological and socio-economic benefits.

These lessons and recommendations serve as a roadmap for future conservation projects across Africa, particularly in conflict-prone and resource-limited regions. By adopting adaptive management strategies and fostering collaboration, we can protect endangered species while empowering communities to become stewards of biodiversity.

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