

Historic Event on Saharan Biodiversity Conservation in Algeria

On 26 December 2007, in Algiers, Algeria, a historic conservation event was held by the Honourable Minister of Planning, Environment and Tourism, Mr. Cherif Rahmani. The conference highlighted work being done by three foundations that have partnered to conserve the threatened biodiversity of the Sahara. Directors from the World Deserts Foundation, the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF) and the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) joined together with a wide variety of governmental nongovernmental institutions to discuss cooperation in conservation of one of the oldest deserts of the world, the Sahara, and its vanishing gazelles and cheetah.

Two international wildlife experts were specially invited to Algeria by the Honourable Minister, Mr. Cherif Rahmani, who is also the President of the World Deserts Foundation. Dr. Laurie Marker, Founder and Executive Director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund and John Newby, Executive Director of the Sahara Conservation Fund met in Algiers to discuss the future of wildlife of the Sahara with the Minister and representatives from the Directorate General of Forests, the National Agency for Nature Conservation, and the National Centre for the Development of Biological Resources.

The Honourable Minister, Mr. Rahmani, stressed that “conservation not only concerns culture and biology but also nature and humanity, contrary to prejudices implying that the Sahara is just an empty space. Nature and Humanity have coexisted for millennia and we intend to maintain this mutually beneficial relationship.”

The conference focussed on the Sahara's critically endangered wildlife, including cheetahs, gazelles and antelopes, and on the role that Algeria is playing in their conservation. Management of antelopes and the problems resulting from human conflict with the critically endangered population of cheetahs were discussed. Marker stated that “Algeria has one of the last populations of the northern cheetah subspecies estimated at around 200 individuals found in the Ahaggar and Tassili National Parks.” In 2006, Marker participated in a collaborative survey in the Ahaggar with members of SCF and the Office du Parc National de l'Ahaggar, Ministry of Culture, and has learned about the great potential of this region and its people to play a major role in cheetah conservation and stated that “Algeria is without doubt the Cheetah Capital of North Africa.”

Cooperation was the main goal of this event to further the process of conserving Algeria's precious wildlife and looking at ways to re-populate species that are already extinct in the country. Areas of collaboration included wildlife census and survey, increasing awareness of wildlife conservation issues, and training of wildlife experts.

During the visit, the Sahara Conservation Fund and the World Deserts Foundation signed an agreement to further cooperation. Minister Rahmani underlined the value of the agreement “not just for Algeria but also in support of conservation efforts throughout North Africa and all peoples who share the Great Saharan Desert.” Given its extent and rich biodiversity, John Newby underlined the critically important role that Algeria can play in international efforts to save endangered species, especially those for which the country is a major range state, such as the slender-horned and Cuvier's gazelles, the cheetah and the houbara bustard.

It was furthermore agreed to hold Sahelo Saharan Interest Group (SSIG)'s annual science meeting in Algeria in 2009 under the patronage of the Honourable Minister Rahmani.

CONTACTS:

Dr. Laurie Marker
Cheetah Conservation Fund
Tel: +264 (0)67 306225
John Newby
Sahara Conservation Fund
Tel: +41 22 3647578