Vitenskapskomiteen for mat og miljø
Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food and Environment

VKM assessment:

Non-detriment finding for the scimitar-horned oryx (*Oryx dammah*)

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Reviewed by the VKM Panel on CITES.

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Scientific name: *Oryx dammah* (Cretzschmar, 1826)

Common name: Scimitar-horned oryx

Norwegian name: Sabelantilope

Type of permit: CITES Appendix I import (Norwegian CITES Regulation Annex 1, list A)

Country of Export: South Africa

Purpose and source: One personal sport-hunted trophy taken from game farm. Purpose code H and source code C.

VKM has adopted the **definition of detriment**, jf. Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) suggested by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Scientific Authority (https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/archive/workshop-american-ginseng-cites-non-detriment-findings.pdf), which defines it as:

1. Harvest that is not sustainable.
2. Harvest that harm the status of the species in the wild.
3. Removal from the wild that results in habitat loss or destruction, or that interferes with recovery efforts for a species.

Given that the scimitar-horned oryx is extinct in the wild, 1 and 2 of the abovementioned points are not relevant to this case. As for 3, extensive reintroduction programmes are in progress, aiming to reintroduce and sustain viable populations of the species in its former distribution range across the Sub-Saharan belt.

Conclusion:

The species` historical range does not include South Africa, thus South Africa is not considered as a suitable reintroduction range for this species. Captive breeding and ranching of scimitar-horned oryx in South Africa for hunting purposes is therefore unlikely to interfere with the conservation efforts and reintroduction projects carried out in the species' historical distribution range. VKM therefore concludes that the requested import of one trophy from a captive-bred/animal born in captivity from South Africa **is unlikely to be detrimental** or interfere with the recovery efforts of the scimitar-horned oryx.

1. Biological Information

Distribution

The scimitar-horned oryx is a large herding antelope that was once widespread across the sub-desert belt of Africa, from Mauritania and Morocco in the west to Egypt and Sudan in the east (Chuven et al., 2018). However, the species has been classified as "extinct in the wild" as there has been no confirmed evidence of the survival of this species since the early 1990s, and it is currently only found in captivity (in large numbers) and in protected areas in Tunisia, Senegal, Morocco and Chad (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2016). Among the last places the oryx were observed before extinction is the Ouadi Rime-Quadi Achim Game Reserve (OROAGR) in Chad. The scimitar-horned oryx is currently being reintroduced into this area, with the goal of restoring a viable population (Chuven et al., 2018). There are currently 89 oryx in OROAGR (71 reintroduced animals and 18 surviving calves; Chuven et al., 2018)

Life history

Female gestation length is eight to eight and a half months, and under favorable environmental conditions (such as in zoos), most females could produce an offspring every year. However, in the wild, environmental conditions dictate the timing and the success of reproduction (Engel, 2004a).

Before they went extinct, scimitar-horned oryx used to inhabit the arid grasslands surrounding the Sahara, where they primarily would feed on various grasses and leguminous plants but also shifting to other foods where available (Engel, 2004b). The species is a migratory species, known to travel distances up to 1300 km per year, in search of food and water (Engel, 2004b). To conserve water, the animals seek shade during the hottest times of the day, resulting in a crepuscular activity pattern with peak activity at dawn and dusk (Gilbert, 2017).

In the wild, scimitar-horned oryx were observed in relatively small herds, ranging between 10-30 animals (Engel, 2004b), but during migrations numerous herds would join and aggregations of thousands were sometimes observed (Gilbert, 2017).

Role in the ecosystem

Prior to extinction, wild populations of the scimitar-horned oryx were subject to predation from large carnivores such as cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), striped and spotted hyena (*Hyaena hyaena* and *Crocuta Crocuta*, respectively), wild dogs *(Lycaon pictus*) and lion (*Panthera leo*). While persecution of these predators in the Sahel area has led to most of them being extirpated, jackals (*Canis spp.*) have been reported to pose a threat to oryx calves in the Sidi Toui National Park in Tunisia (Molcanova, 2004).

2. Population trend

Not applicable as the species is extinct in the wild

3. Conservation status

Extinct in the wild (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2016).

4. Threats/causes of extinction

There are numerous reasons for the decline and subsequent extinction of the scimitar-horned oryx (Newby, 1988), including over-hunting, war, development, drought and competition with livestock (Wakefield et al. 2004). Hunting is believed to be the single most important cause of the rapid decline of the species, with the oryx being hunted for meat, hides, leather and trophies (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2016).

5. Conservation and management measures

International legislation

- Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). Commercial trade in this species is prohibited, but trade for scientific purposes may occur (e.g. exchange of individuals for captive breeding programmes). However, Appendix I specimens bred in captivity may be traded for commercial purposes and shall be treated as wild specimens included in Appendix II (CITES).
- Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Appendix I (CMS).
- African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Under this convention the species is under total protection but may be hunted, killed or captured given special authorisation (Gilbert and Woodfine, 2004).

Conservation measures

A global captive breeding programme was established in the 1960s, mainly based on wild-caught individuals from the Chad population (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2016). The global population is estimated to descend from as few as 40-50 founders, thus most likely representing only a small fraction of historical genetic diversity (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2016). The International Studbook for scimitar-horned oryx is held by the Maxwell Preservation Trust and holds records of 1531 animals in 154 institutions (Gilbert, 2017). Europe, North America and Australasia have coordinated captive breeding program, and all breeding is registered in The International Studbook. As many as 11,000 individuals are kept on Texas Ranches and 4000 in the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries (Gilbert, 2015).

6.Trade/use

Legal

Captive bred individuals can be traded as CITES Appendix II species. When searching for *Oryx dammah* in the CITES trade database (Cites.trade.org) the majority of the many records of transactions involving this species between 2010 and 2022 are for trophies exported from either South Africa or the US, mainly using source codes F (animals bred in captivity) and sometimes R (ranched specimen). Scimitar-horned oryx is a very popular species for trophy hunting (see e.g https://worldwidetrophyadventures.com/outfitter-profile?hunt_id=1438) and is extensively bred for this purpose, for example in Texas (e.g. https://www.oxhuntingranch.com/texas/scimitar-horned-oryx-hunting/) and across South Africa (e.g. https://www.johnxsafaris.com/information/scimitar-oryx/)

Illegal

No records of illegal trade were found. However, one of the animals reintroduced to the OROAGR in Chad was killed by a poacher, indicating that hunting remains a critical threat to this species (Chuven et al. 2018).

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