

Thuraya teams with Sahara Conservation Fund to save endangered species

Case Study:

Thuraya extends efforts by the Sahara Conservation Fund to protect endangered species

Client:

Sahara Conservation Fund

Products:

*Thuraya XT
Thuraya IP+*

Area of Operations:

Sub-Saharan Africa



At 3am EST, Facebook users in North America see a post appear on the timeline of the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF). The photo shows a dama gazelle among the sand dunes in northern Chad.

This rare image of a critically endangered species reflects the recent collaboration with Thuraya, which has created a real-time window on a remarkable wildlife organization for people who are passionate about saving and protecting the wildlife of the Sahara and educating the public on their vital conservation work.

International partnership

Thuraya terminals and network will play a key role in one of SCF's most ambitious projects to date – a massive international collaboration to re-introduce the scimitar-horned oryx into the wild in central Chad.

The work is spearheaded by the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi (EAD) and the Government of Chad, with the support of SCF and its partners in the international zoo community. The animals will be brought to Chad from Abu Dhabi, where they are being managed by EAD as part of the heritage herds of HH the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Founder of the UAE.

First, all the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place, including holding pens and a base camp to support the operation. SCF will have a team of about 10 people on the ground, who will use Thuraya voice and data terminals to co-ordinate the complex task of preparing the site to receive the animals.

Once the project is up and running, SCF will continue to rely on Thuraya for essential communications and security as it monitors the animals and manages the itineraries of visiting scientists and veterinary experts.

Preserving Saharan wildlife for future generations

The SCF is an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) accredited in St Louis, USA, with headquarters in Switzerland. Its mission is to preserve the wildlife of the Sahara and its surrounding grasslands.

“We have been in existence since 2004,” says CEO John Newby. “Before this, the conservation community had largely ignored the wildlife of the Sahara region, which is home to a vast array of exquisite species on the verge of extinction. Unfortunately, some of them are disappearing at an alarming rate or are already extinct in the wild. Over the last 11 years we have poured

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all of our efforts into combating the loss of biodiversity in the Sahara and reversing the decline."

SCF operates from two main centres in North Africa: its long-established hub in Niger and a new one under construction in Chad (see panel). Each supports the mobile teams that conduct monitoring and project work in the Sahara and the semi-desert Sahel. With teams from eight to 10 people they spend up to three weeks in the field continually on the move as they track elusive animals across the desert. It is hard and sometimes dangerous work that takes place in remote areas that have very few roads and absolutely no telephone lines or mobile networks.

SCF turns to Thuraya for its communications needs

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SCF uses the Thuraya service to co-ordinate work in the field. Mobile teams must speak daily with base camp, receive instructions and feed-back data and findings, and communicate with each other when more than one team is in the field. Wildlife is unpredictable and moves around, so the teams have to keep their itineraries fluid, moving to new



base camps as soon as plans change.

Co-ordination can be complex, especially when sub-teams are converging from different locations to work on the same project. The photo of the dama gazelle mentioned earlier was taken from an aircraft guided to the remote spot by a team on the ground that used the Thuraya service to communicate directions.

Vital tools for safety and security

The knowledge that mobile teams have reliable voice and data wherever they travel enables SCF to mitigate the risks of working and traveling in

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remote desert and semi-desert areas. Base camp uses the Thuraya service to keep mobile teams safe by tracking their precise location at all times and to direct their operations, movements and provisioning.

Thuraya also comes into its own when things go wrong. If someone falls ill or a vehicle breaks down the team can phone for immediate assistance. At the very least this saves time and scarce resources, and in extreme circumstances can save lives.

When it comes to security, avoidance of trouble is the best policy, and Thuraya is invaluable in this regard. "Most of the time our teams encounter very few people in the desert," says Newby, "but we always have to be aware of the potential for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some dangerous armed groups criss-cross the Sahara and we obviously go out of our way to avoid them."

Colleagues at base camp in Niger constantly monitor reports of trouble or armed groups and immediately alert field workers if there is any likelihood of coming into contact with them. The mobile teams then take prompt avoiding action, as when base camp alerted them via Thuraya that Boko Haram – the group responsible for kidnapping 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria, in April 2014 – were making incursions into southern Niger.



Thuraya partnership proves a game changer for SCF

The relationship between SCF and Thuraya became even closer in 2014 when the mobile satellite communications company agreed to partner with the NGO, providing free equipment, airtime and data. For Thuraya – whose company purpose is to "save and improve lives" – the partnership was a perfect fit. "We were delighted to be able to help with the important work SCF is doing in the Sahara and Sahel," says Raouf Khalife, Director of Marketing & Branding for Thuraya. "It is a sign of our strong commitment to the region, its people and its wildlife."

The partnership has enabled SCF to step up its message to the world. For the first time it can use the Thuraya mobile data service for internet connectivity to flash photos, videos and updates around the globe in almost real time directly from the teams in the field. The response from Facebook users and other social media fans has been fantastic. According to Newby,

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"This is very important to us," says Newby, "because we need funding, sponsors and partners to carry out our work effectively, and awareness is one of the main ways we can attract new people and get them interested and involved. We are tremendously grateful to Thuraya for giving us the means to communicate more quickly and comprehensively via its data service."

every time the NGO uses Thuraya to post real-time reports, photos and videos of its field work the number of "likes" on social media shoots up.

SCF is involved in protecting some of the most threatened species in the Sahara region, such as the addax, the North African ostrich and the Barbary sheep. The more engaging multi-media content it can capture in the wild, and then transmit directly to its followers around the world via Thuraya, the more publicity and funding it will attract.

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To learn more about Thuraya's products and services for NGOs and remote workers, visit:

www.thuraya.com/relief-comms

To learn more about the Sahara Conservation Fund, visit:

www.saharacconservation.org
www.facebook.com/saharacf

