

“Saving a Species through Trophy Hunting”

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The scimitar-horned oryx (*Oryx dammah*) is a species of antelope with very long, curved horns. It has been extinct in its native habitat among the arid plains and deserts of northern Africa since the 1980s, except for some individuals reintroduced to the wild from captive populations. Around the same time, however, their numbers in captivity began to grow dramatically as American ranchers, primarily in Texas, began breeding them for use in trophy hunts. According to the Exotic Wildlife Association, in 1979 there were only 32 scimitar-horned oryx in captive breeding programs in the state of Texas, but by 2012 there were over 10,000.

In April of 2012, however, in response to a court order that resulted from a lawsuit filed by the group *Friends of the Animals*, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reversed its previous policy of excluding from certain protections under the Endangered Species Act scimitar-horned oryx that were captive-bred in the United States. Two years later, the Texas population of the oryx fell to half of their earlier levels. Then, in January of 2014, the U.S. Congress passed budget legislation that reintroduced the exemption, and Texas game ranches continue to breed these antelopes for trophy hunting on private lands.

Questions about the case:

1. Is it wrong to breed members of an endangered species of wildlife in order to sell them to trophy hunters? Why or why not?
2. What impacts might a ban on hunting captive bred scimitar-horned oryx in the United States have on the species considered as a whole?
3. Would it be better to risk complete extinction of the scimitar-horned oryx by relying exclusively on zoos and reintroduction programs in the oryx’s native habitat? Why or why not?

Information for Instructors Using “Saving a Species through Trophy Hunting”

Suggested uses for this case:

1. This case can be used to motivate discussion of the value of *in situ* vs. captive preservation of endangered species.
2. The case could be used in conjunction with Module 3, Lecture 1: “Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Ethics” in the accompanying materials.
3. It might also be used in conjunction with Module 2, Lecture 1 on “Philosophical Approaches to Animal Ethics.”

Sources used in preparing this case (all accessed 11 April 2016):

My San Antonio April 3, 2012, “Hunting ban could see last of ‘unicorns’”:

http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/Hunting-ban-could-see-last-of-unicorns-3453819.php#item-38489

U.S. Fish and Wildlife regulations effective April 4, 2012, *Federal Register*, Thursday, January 5, 2012, pp. 431-438: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-01-05/pdf/2012-23.pdf>

“Approved—Three amigos exempted from endangered species list,” *Lone Star Outdoor News*, January 18, 2014: <http://www.lsonews.com/approved-three-amigos-come-endangered-species-list/>