

SAMPLE COPY-EDIT

Arabian oryx

Arabian oryx are large antelopes measuring 81–102cm in height and weighing 65–75 kg. They have large hoofs that prevent them from sinking into the sand and two long 38–68 cm straight black horns. Oryx have adapted to desert conditions and can survive without running water for months at a time! Their kidneys are very efficient so almost no water is lost as urine. Their coats are white so they reflect the sun's rays rather than absorbing them. The young have sandy coloured ed coats at birth, which act as camouflage to help hide them from predators.

During the hot summer months the oryx move to the edge of the sand dunes where they feed early in the morning on the dew-laden plants. They scrape hollows under the bushes growing on the side of sand dunes, then rest in these shady spots for much of the day. They feed again in the early evening and at night on roots and bulbs, which they dig up with their long horns. These give them moisture, as does the early morning dew that has settled on their coats which they lick up!

They live in herds of 10 to 30 animals. Each herd has a dominant female who leads the herd to fresh grazing areas, and a dominant male who mates with all the mature females. A single calf is born after a gestation period of about 260 days. The calf is able to stand up and follow the herd within a few hours!

These mammals are endangered, but in 1961 they were nearing extinction with only 80 to 100 being found in the deserts of Omani. Three of these wild oryx were captured and sent to Phoenix Zoo. Six other oryx were sent to Phoenix from other zoos with the idea of creating a World Herd. Oryx breed very well in captivity and herds have been released back into the Omani desert. They are still endangered but with world-wide co-operation, and continued breeding programmes, this species may have been brought back from the brink of extinction.

DID YOU KNOW?

The oryx's two horns look like just one when seen from side-on. Historians think this might explain how the legend of the unicorn arose.

[1] *By day oryx rest in the shade, sometimes using a shallow pit that they scrape with their horns.*

[2] *Oryx walk tirelessly to find fresh grass to graze. They follow the smell of recent rain to look for of new growth, sometimes walking up to 40km a night. Broad, shovel-shaped hooves help them to cross the soft sand and loose gravel.*

[3] *A female oryx gives birth to a single calf once a year, usually during winter rains. The youngsters sandy colour helps to hide it from predators.*

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