Shaumari Wildlife Reserve: where Jordan reintroduced the Arabian oryx in 1978

A 22-square-kilometre fenced reserve near Azraq, founded 1975 by the RSCN, where the Arabian oryx, Persian onager, and Somali ostrich were reintroduced after decades of regional extinction. The oryx now number in the hundreds.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

In 1972, the last wild Arabian oryx in the world was shot. The species was extinct in the wild. Six years later, in 1978, four oryx from the World Herd captive-breeding programme were released into a fenced reserve in eastern Jordan. The herd grew. By the 1990s, oryx from this reserve and others were being released back into Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE. The Shaumari Wildlife Reserve in Jordan — operated since 1975 by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature — is one of the half-dozen places where the species was brought back from the dead.[1]

The reserve is small (22 km²), fenced, and the easiest way in Jordan to actually see oryx — the white antelope with the long curved horns that became the model for the unicorn legend.

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1Why visit Shaumari

Shaumari is a conservation success story you can walk into. The reserve protects several endangered Middle Eastern species, including Arabian oryx, Somali ostriches, Persian onagers (an Asian wild ass from Iran), and gazelles.[1]

The 22 km² reserve is large enough that the animals roam, small enough that a 90-minute jeep tour will reliably encounter most of them.

2The oryx reintroduction story

The Arabian oryx — Oryx leucoryx — was hunted to extinction in the wild by 1972. The World Herd captive-breeding programme (ten oryx, eventually expanded) had been started by the IUCN in 1962 with animals captured before the wild population collapsed. Shaumari was one of the first sites to receive World Herd oryx for release: four animals in 1978. Within a decade, the Shaumari herd had grown to dozens; by the 2000s, animals from this herd and other re-introduction sites had been released back into Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and Israel. The Arabian oryx is now categorised as Vulnerable rather than Extinct in the Wild.

> In 1972, the last wild Arabian oryx was shot. In 1978, four were released into Shaumari. The species came back.

3What you'll see

On a typical 90-minute jeep tour:

- **Arabian oryx**. Several dozen typically grazing or resting in the shade. Look for the curved horns that gave rise to the unicorn legend.
- **Persian onager**. Asian wild ass, smaller than horses, faster than they look.
- **Somali ostriches**. The largest birds you'll see; running speeds up to 70 km/h.
- **Gazelles**. Goitered gazelles and Dorcas gazelles in small herds.
- **Bird life**. Steppe eagles overwinter; resident birds include desert larks and finches.

4Getting there

Shaumari is approximately 100 km east of Amman, near the town of Azraq.[1] Logistics:

- **Self-drive.** 90 minutes from Amman; the reserve has its own visitor centre.

- **Combine with the Azraq area.** Wetland reserve (5 min), Qasr Azraq (15 min).
- **Jeep tour.** Required for entry into the wildlife area — book at the visitor centre. ~25–35 JD per person.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> Solo riders join the next available jeep tour; tours run on a rolling schedule. Bring binoculars.

5Practical tips

- **Best season.** October–April for wildlife activity (cooler temperatures bring more daytime movement).
- **Best time of day.** Dawn or late afternoon — oryx rest at midday.
- **Binoculars.** Essential for the bird life and for distant gazelles.
- **Cameras.** Long lens (200 mm+) for wildlife. Tripod optional.
- **Combine with.** Azraq Wetland Reserve + Qasr Azraq for a half-day Azraq circuit.

References

1. Wikipedia — Shaumari Wildlife Reserve

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by an RSCN or ASEZA-affiliated wildlife biologist before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia.