



Field Report: Field Monitoring of the endangered Rothschild's Giraffe in Soysambu Conservancy, Kenya

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I recently returned from two months in Kenya, volunteering at Soysambu Conservancy. Soysambu Conservancy is a 48,000 acre private farm that has a conservation lease to protect its wildlife resources. The Conservancy currently supports approximately 90 endangered Rothschild's giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis rothschildii*), as well as countless other wildlife species including lion, leopard, eland, buffalo, zebra, colubus monkey, flamingoes – and much more.



During my time there, I primarily worked at the Field Study Center to enhance their giraffe monitoring program to ensure the effectiveness of the long-term monitoring for the giraffe population there. I coordinated with Dr Julian Fennessy of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation about which tasks I should prioritize during my time at Soysambu. I continued the biweekly monitoring of giraffe in the Conservancy and completely overhauled the identification database to ensure it was up-to-date and accurate regarding the current giraffe population size and structure. I trained the Conservancy staff how to manage and catalog images taken during the monitoring sessions, and how to update the identification database after each monitoring session. I developed methods and research protocol to ensure consistency of data collection, and designated a clear schedule to ensure regular reporting. I also set up data spreadsheets and trained staff how to enter data. Additionally, I implemented the use of a photo recognition software program (Wild-ID) that was developed at Dartmouth College to make the monitoring program more efficient. Lastly, I wrote a comprehensive User Guide to instruct staff how to conduct the giraffe monitoring program and to use the Wild-ID software.

My work at Soysambu was intended to help the Giraffe Conservation Foundation gain more information about the status of the giraffe on the property and in turn support the current giraffe conservation



management practices. The first task I completed was to update the identification database (in electronic and paper forms) based on the current giraffe population. I focused on obtaining good quality left- and right-side photos of each giraffe, including any new juveniles. I reorganized some of the identification labels, since they had become mis-assigned. After that, I re-designed the monitoring protocol to include using Wild-ID software to identify photos of the giraffe taken during each monitoring session – instead of manually identifying the photographed giraffe by comparing the photos taken during the monitoring session to the photos in the

identification manual. Finally, I trained the staff in how to follow the new protocol, and reported my assessments of the current state at Soysambu to the CEO, Kathryn Combes.



I believe my efforts at Soysambu helped the Giraffe Conservation Foundation promote its mission and support giraffe conservation across Africa. I significantly improved the comprehensiveness of the Soysambu Rothschild's giraffe identification manual. Additionally, the implementation of Wild-ID should noticeably decrease the amount of time it takes to analyze photos taken after each monitoring session, which should improve the efficiency of the monitoring program. I also believe the comments I made to Soysambu's CEO about increasing productivity and effort in the workplace could be beneficial both to Soysambu's Field Study Center, and to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, by ensuring the monitoring program is continued effectively going forward and the data is collected correctly.

My experience at Soysambu Conservancy has allowed me to develop many invaluable skills. Primarily, I enhanced my ability to communicate scientific information effectively and clearly by discussing the best practices for the giraffe monitoring program. I also improved my educational outreach by giving presentations to the staff and visiting groups about the giraffe monitoring program. This experience was the most collaborative office environment I have experienced, so I improved my multi-tasking capabilities and felt constantly stimulated by the variety of tasks going on. Furthermore, I gained an even greater appreciation for the importance of conserving wildlife, and I have a better understanding of the complexities involved in wildlife management. Overall, I feel that my time at the Conservancy was well spent, and that I accomplished my goals.

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