

Northwest Namibia – Field Report



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Emma Hart (GCF, University College Dublin)

Earlier this month I reported on the first flooding event in the study area, now I am delighted to say there have almost been too many to count! The Hoanib, Hoarusib and Khumib Rivers have all been in flood over the past few days and we had a fun time negotiating the flowing water, as well as the sticky mud and steep gorges that it leaves behind.

First, we headed towards the Hoanib River across the Giribis Plains, which had turned green overnight from recent rains. When reaching the Hoanib River we were amazed how much everything had changed – the water had carved out an entirely new. The old tracks were gone, trees that had been on the riverbank now formed islands where water had flowed on both sides, and in many places standing water remained. It meant tricky driving and lots of jumping out to test the depth of water or mud before proceeding. The stakes were raised even further as my trusty vehicle 'The Beast' experienced some battery issues and we had a tense moment each morning as we waited to see if the engine would kick into life!



The Beast performed brilliantly in the mud however, and the new tyres got a good test run in both deep water and on the steep riverbanks! The giraffe had wisely exited the river during the flood but were slowly making their way back. Using the UHF receiver we managed to track down our collared giraffe 'Present' in the lower Hoanib River, before having to turn back as the riverbed still consisted of slippery mud rather than the sand I had become accustomed to. The elephants however were loving the mud and were busy sliding around on their bellies!



Moving northwards into the mountains around Okongwe we came across a host of giraffe who had left the riverbeds to escape the floods. Many cows were seen nursing their small calves that had only been born a month or so before, and we were happy to track down our other collared girl, HSBF008, and her calf 'Welcome'.

Arriving at Purros we were greeted by the setting sun on a still flowing river, and the Hoarusib River continued to flood for another four days. While we waited for the flood to subside we headed further

north to the Khumib River. While still wet in patches the flow in the river had subsided enough to give us access, and we were able to track it far west into the desert where it had broken through deep into the dune field.

Back in the Hoarusib we negotiated sandstorms, floods and thunderstorms to track down some of the giraffe that had remained in the area despite the floods. We also came across a giraffe carcass from which we could extract an additional DNA sample. All in all, despite encountering fewer giraffe than usual, it was wonderful to see the huge clouds roll across the desert and experience the rivers in full flood, knowing that it means fresh new growth for the giraffe and other inhabitants of the study area.

In total we identified 16 groups of giraffe comprising 55 individuals, all of which were already included in the database.

A big thank you to GCF, University College Dublin, and to the sponsors for making this conservation research possible. Stay tuned for the next update from the field!



