

# Northwest Namibia – Field Report



June 2017

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While the most exciting part of giraffe research is to get out into the field, the fieldwork is of course only useful if we analyse the collected data and communicate our findings. This month I headed back to Ireland to present the research to a panel of academic experts at University College Dublin (UCD), the academic host institution for my PhD. I returned to Namibia with some great feedback and also tips on how to improve the project. With only a few days left in the month of June I headed directly to the research area, keen to see how the giraffe were getting on and the effects of the late rains.

As ever, I was not disappointed. After winding through the rocky outcrops west of Sesfontein I emerged onto the Giribis Plains. The grasses were not the shade of vibrant green they had been a few weeks ago immediately following the rain, but were now heavy with seed. Each species of grass has a slightly different shade of stem, leaf and seed and the result is a whole palette of colour that stretches across the open plains. Hundreds of sleek springbok had congregated and, along with the odd incongruous ostrich, they were busy munching down as much of the nutritious new growth as possible.



I drove on, keen to reach the Hoanib River and start on the primary objective for this fieldtrip – a quick check on the phenology (stage of growth) of the three species of giraffe browse that we are studying in detail alongside our partners at the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST). A quick dash down the river before the sun set resulted in not only the phenology data that I needed, but a sighting of a familiar group of giraffe browsing some acacia trees.



The light fades fast in the desert and, while much of the world have been celebrating ‘the longest day for the longest neck’ (World Giraffe Day – 21 June 2017), we are experiencing the longest nights of the year here in Namibia. Out in the field it is wise now to find a spot to camp by 5.00pm at the latest, and then to settle in with some good reading material (and try not to pay too much attention to noises outside the light of the cooking fire!).

The next day I awoke to the sounds of curious jackals checking out my campsite. A long drive took me up the Swaragab and through the mountains past Okongwe. On the previous fieldtrip, we did not see a single zebra. However, zebra migrate en masse over hundreds of kilometres to make the most of sporadic rainfall events. This time as I drove

north many dotted the scree covered hillsides and it seems they have returned to the area, for now at least.

Dropping down into the Hoarusib River I was pleased to see the usual contingent of giraffe and was also rewarded by a large herd of elephants After collecting the necessary phenology data I did one more loop of the river before heading back towards Sesfontein.

A quick trip this month, but watch this space: in a week's time we will be heading out with the exciting aim of equipping five giraffe with our new solar GPS satellite units in the Hoanib catchment. These collars will give us a better idea of the giraffe's movements and how they are making use of their home range. This is key information in terms of our ongoing conservation efforts.



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



