Note from the Editor

Those who know me personally can appreciate that writing this Editor’s Note in is not easy. I lost one of my closest friends this year—Dr JP Suraud. JP was not only a close friend but also a very valued colleague and even after almost four months I still find it hard to believe that we will never chat or meet again. I do hope we as a giraffe community can continue to pay tribute to JP’s life by continuing his work in and dreams for conservation in Africa!

With this in mind, this new issue of Giraffa – the second for 2012 – highlights some exciting new research and conservation projects on the African continent. You can get a taste for what research is to come in Botswana with the first ecological giraffe study up and running; in South Africa a first for giraffe research is underway in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park; in Niger new initiatives are being funded to support the long-term conservation and management of the endangered West African giraffe (hope some of you can read French! 😊) and finally, in Kenya various translocations of the endangered Rothschild’s giraffe continue to make headlines and support their future survival.

GCF’s ongoing efforts to document the current conservation status of giraffe throughout Africa are producing some interesting reads and we are presenting the country profile of the DRC in this edition. In addition Aimee Nelson provides fascinating insight from the captive world on the coercion required to move captive giraffe – wow, there is a lot of work and preplanning involved! Finally, lots of tall tales and more for your festive season reading...

On a side note, for all interested, a proposal to establish an official Giraffe and Okapi Specialist Group under the IUCN Species Survival Commission has recently been submitted. Great collaboration between the two species experts helped to develop a comprehensive document and we expect to hear from IUCN in the near future about taking the next steps – thanks to all involved and fingers crossed!

Merry Christmas to all, ‘guten Rutsch’ and share a thought for all those around the world conserving these amazing creatures and the habitats on which they depend. And if you have time, do something special for those you care about – short and tall!

Cheers

Julian Fennessy
Chair IGWG & GCF Trustee

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Newsletter of the IUCN SSC ASG
International Giraffe Working Group (IGWG) & the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF)

Objectives

IGWG: to define the taxonomy of giraffe with respect to the historic classifications as seen today across the African continent blending traditional taxonomic morphometrics with molecular genetic techniques and to establish the effect of habitat fragmentation and reduction on conservation management decisions for the future success of the species.

GCF is dedicated to securing a future for all giraffe populations and (sub)species in the wild.
Obituary: Dr Jean-Patrick ‘JP’ Suraud
Julian Fennessy & Giraffe Conservation Foundation

It is with enormous regret and a tremendous sense of professional and personal loss that the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) acknowledges the tragic death of Dr Jean-Patrick Suraud; ‘JP’ to all who knew him.

JP was many things to many people. Privately, he was husband and father to a beautiful wife and precious daughter, and he was a son to loving and proud parents. Professionally, in December 2011 he successfully defended his PhD on the West African giraffe at the University of Lyon, his life’s dream, and in early 2012 moved with his young family to the Republic of Congo where he had accepted the role as the Ecology Manager for African Parks. He was young, enthusiastic, energetic, fun and an exceedingly competent and capable conservation manager; one of a new generation. He was a true hope for the future of conservation with the world at his feet. To his colleagues, he was an extremely well liked and highly respected peer, as was evident by the number of professional awards and accolades he had begun to receive from around the globe; quite extraordinary considering that he was just at the beginning of his career, and further evidence, if required, of his innate potential. But he was also a pleasure to work with: JP was engaging, open to new ideas, motivated, and unforgottably and infectiously fun! He also had that rarest of talents in the conservation world, not only was he more than able to provide sound and considered advice, but he was also extremely open to receiving and accepting advice and ideas from, and of working with, others.

JP’s giraffe project in Niger was pioneering. Such work is never without its difficulties and JP was the consummate professional in dealing with the complexities of the unique situation he found himself in, and in his efforts to conserve and understand one of the most endangered populations of wildlife anywhere in the world – the West African giraffe. Over the years the academic and professional reputation of his work spread around the world, which combined with his selflessness, classic Frenchman’s charm and his infectious sense of fun (that word again) cemented his standing among his peers and within the conservation community. This ability to strike such an effective and authentic professional and personal balance was perhaps one of his greatest attributes as a conservation scientist. Who could ever forget his impact at the Indaba in Namibia in 2011? His fascinating presentation was voted as the best of the week by fellow delegates, but this was soon to be overshadowed by his impromptu ‘birthday’ celebration which captured the imagination of the entire lodge, from other guests to staff and obviously all delegates; absolutely unforgettable.

Over the years all of us at GCF had come to know JP, but none more so than me. JP initially contacted me in 2005 to get help with a survey methodology for counting the West Africa giraffe. This first contact eventually led to convincing JP that he was the right person to undertake a PhD on this amazing animal and their ecology. As a co-supervisor of his PhD and co-author on some scientific papers, we become close family friends, talked weekly and visited each other several times while sharing a love of life and conservation.

This makes it perhaps even more difficult to accept and understand the events of that sunny southern African day in late August 2012. JP and his extremely experienced copilot and flight teacher Austin Lindsey had started the journey of a lifetime – flying an Ultralight from Durban, South Africa to its new home to help monitor illegal wildlife hunting in Odzala National Park, Congo. The first stop on this epic journey was to be Namibia where we were so looking forward to catching. I had the Tequila on ice, and together with my family was looking forward to a quiet evening with JP. My wife Steph believed as she answered the phone that fateful day, that it was a call from JP apologising for being late – a French tradition! Instead it was JP’s father calling from Paris bearing the tragic news of JP’s fatal accident en route to Windhoek. The shock and distress was palpable for all concerned, and still is when writing these difficult words on so many levels.

From collaring giraffe together in Niger, dancing a birthday conga in Namibia, to fine wine and dining in Paris (Allez les Bleu!), JP has left a lasting impression on all those he met. To GCF he was a valuable member of our
team and a great mate, but of course he was much, much more than that and our hearts go out to his lovely wife and daughter, and his parents for whom the loss is so great – we are so very sorry!

GCF remains committed to ensuring a lasting legacy of JP, to ensuring his vision, example and values are not forgotten. We are working with those that loved and cared for JP on a number of ideas and will provide further information once details are confirmed.

Adieu JP – the world is smaller and worse off without you!

In memoriam: Dr Jean-Patrick ‘JP’ Suraud
Collaboration and cooperation are not dirty words for Elephants Without Borders (EWB). This month saw EWB at the centre of an innovative international conservation initiative with the launch of the most significant stage of their recently established Herbivore Ecology Programme.

Breaking new territory, this exciting new project is the result of collaboration between a number of international partners, a move considered essential in the long term sustainability of conservation research. Such partnership and cooperation will provide much needed, and some may suggest long overdue, efficiency measures in the field of conservation research, through the pooling of resources, expertise and technical know-how. It will also endeavour to prevent any wasteful repetition of effort by concentrating on the sharing of information and ensuring there is no time wasted reinventing the proverbial wheel!

EWB, with the continued endorsement of Botswana’s Department of Wildlife and National Parks, are facilitating this international project in partnership with Australia’s University of New South Wales (UNSW) and two PhD students under the collective guidance of Drs Keith Leggett, Mike Chase and Julian Fennessy, from the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF).

As EWB’s recent findings have all too clearly indicated, the timing of this initiative could not have been better. There is an unquestionable need for a greater understanding in the area of Human – wildlife conflict. UNSW’s Tempe Adams will concentrate her efforts in the field of human-elephant conflict (HEC) building on field implementation and trials of HEC work undertaken by Dr Anna Songhurst, on the western side of the Delta where elephant numbers and impacts have increased over the last decade. Using field-based methods will be key to help communities manage impacts from this region’s abundant elephant population.

In a separate initiative UNSW’s Kylie McQualter will establish what will astonishingly be the first ever long-term study on giraffe in Botswana. EWB’s May 2011 report indicated an alarming 65% reduction in giraffe numbers in Botswana in the last 10 years, and so Kylie’s work will look at range, distribution, movements (spatial ecology), impacts of illegal hunting and comparison between two key giraffe areas – the Chobe and the Delta. This will provide essential input into a much needed continent-wide conservation management strategy being developed by GCF.

Interestingly during the project’s very first game drive along the Chobe River waterfront, Drs Mike Chase and Julian Fennessy were discussing the recent phenomenon along the Chobe waterfront of the bark stripping on the Natal Mahogany tree. Often the work of elephant on other trees species in the Park (and elsewhere) it had become clear much of the damage was too high for most elephant and that on some trees the bark was actually being stripped from top to bottom! The only likely culprit of course could be the giraffe and uncannily just as this was being discussed the team came upon a large and extremely dark giraffe bull indulgently demonstrating just how it can be done.

In his many years in the bush, this has never been seen, or certainly noticed by Mike before. Needless to say witnessing this damage raised a plethora of questions; is this a normal occurrence? Does it only occur during times of stress during dry seasons? Is it a regular source of protein, moisture or other nutrients? Indeed is such damage replicated in other giraffe populations across the continent? Just one example of the many outstanding questions that need to be answered when discussing the environmental impact, and subsequent management, of Botswana’s large herbivores and some of the continent’s most iconic of animals.

And this was just on day one of this long-term project which refuses to be confined by traditional boundaries or prejudices of any kind.

Read more about this project on www.elephantswithoutborders.org or www.giraffeconservation.org

This article was previously published in the Zambezi Traveller.

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The way home: Moving a herd of 1.6 reticulated giraffe into a new facility
Aimee S. Nelson, Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo

Introduction
In October 2010, after much training and hard work, Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo’s herd of 1.6 reticulated giraffe entered a new facility of their own free will. This long awaited move for the zoo’s seven giraffe took careful planning and execution by the giraffe staff. The old barn had been inadequate for some time: spaces were crowded, shifting was a challenge, and training opportunities were extremely limited. In the winter of 2010, we received a very generous donation that enabled us to build a new giraffe facility. We were overjoyed, but realised that we had a lot of hard work ahead of us. The new barn, by Fauna Research, was to be built on the opposite side of the giraffe’s outdoor exhibit space. There would be a chute area/exercise yard that leads from the exhibit to the new barn. The new facility would be four times larger than the old barn, and would be complete with a Fauna Research Giraffe Tamer. It would improve the care of our herd (and the sanity of our keepers!) in a multitude of ways. There was one thing we knew for sure: we wanted the herd to walk into the new barn of their own free will. Each giraffe has his or her own personality, and getting them to enter the barn would require considering each giraffe’s individual challenges and needs. The herd consists of Jelani, the somewhat fearless bull, the natural herd leader and oldest giraffe Zuri, her calf, Zahra, and four year old Mystic. Also in the herd is Kali, another older female, Luna, Mystic’s half sister, and Luna’s calf, Kesi. As anyone who works with giraffe knows, asking them to follow a keeper into a giant, shiny, new barn was like asking them to follow a keeper off a cliff. It would take a lot of patience and understanding, but we gave the herd the best tools we could. Utilising these tools and the strong bond of trust between giraffe and keepers, the move was safe and successful.

Challenges
We faced many overwhelming challenges in the move. The barn was not completed until October, which left us racing against time and the impending Indiana winter to get the giraffe moved into the new building. The entrance to the new barn was on the opposite side of the exhibit. The herd spent most of their time at the hay racks and public feeding platform, both of which are at the front of the exhibit. They only occasionally ventured to the back of the exhibit. Due to the ongoing construction, there were loud noises, large equipment, and strange people surrounding the area every day. We have protected contact with our giraffe, so we could not always go where we were asking them to go. Every night, the giraffe returned to their old barn, and the whole process was started anew the next day. Then, there was the largest challenge of all: Kali and Luna. When Kali arrived at our zoo at age 15, she was overwhelmed with the changes around her. While she was fine in the barn and exercise yard, she refused to enter the exhibit, despite strong encouragement. She remained at the barn while watching the others go to and from exhibit every day for five years. But she wasn’t alone. When Luna and Mystic arrived in 2007, Luna quickly bonded with Kali. Both have extremely cautious personalities, even for giraffe. Keepers were unable to get Luna to follow the others to the exhibit. She stayed at the barn for three years. We wanted them all to cross the exhibit and enter the new barn willingly, but how could we do that when two members of herd had never even been into the exhibit?

Many ideas were implemented to help get Luna and Kali to go to the exhibit. While there would be periods of great improvement, there was never complete success. In early June 2010, we decided to request the aid of Steve Martin and Wouter Stellard of Natural Encounters, Inc. They had experience with the situation, and shared with us the desire to get Luna and Kali to join the others. Not only did we want to improve their quality of life, but we wanted the process to be as positive as possible. With the expertise of Steve and Wouter, we were able to use a mild aversive in the most positive way possible. We created a “moveable wall” by securing tarps to long pieces of narrow, plastic pipe. Several people were required for the process, but we tried to place the giraffe keepers at the entrance to the exhibit. We wanted to be something positive (like the rest of the herd awaiting them in the exhibit) for them to move toward. We created two “walls”, and each was carried by two people (one on each end). We worked with Kali and Luna separately. We closed off the area to the public completely. Once the individual giraffe was in the exercise and had access to the exhibit, keepers would enter the space at the back of the yard. The walls were rolled up and kept horizontal. We observed the giraffe’s reaction. If the giraffe moved a step toward the exhibit, we did not move at all. If the giraffe moved toward the back of the yard, they all took a step forward. This process was broken down into multiple levels. Each level increased the use of walls in small increments. For example, if the giraffe took another step toward us, we moved the walls into an upright position while keeping them rolled up. If the giraffe moved toward the exhibit, the keepers stopped. If the giraffe came toward the back of the yard, the keepers began to slowly unfurl the walls. Every time the giraffe took a step toward
the walls, the keepers took a step toward the giraffe. This was so the giraffe had freedom in the situation. We were giving them the chance to join the others on their own. We did not force them out or frighten them. If Kali or Luna became distressed, we stopped immediately and retreated from the yard. Kali responded to this quickly, and walked into the exhibit after approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Luna took a bit longer, but did enter the exhibit that same day. Both were fairly calm, seemed comforted to be reunited with the herd, and began exploring the exhibit. Through much training, patience, and trust, we were finally able to get both Luna and Kali on exhibit. It was a more emotional experience for the staff than it was for Luna and Kali themselves. This process did have to be used on increasing smaller scales as Kali and Luna eventually began to follow the herd to the exhibit without encouragement from keepers.

While this was a very detailed and planned process, and this brief description may not give it full justice, our main goal was to keep the experience as positive for Kali and Luna as possible. However, on Luna’s second day on exhibit, she went into labour. On June 3, 2010, she delivered her first calf, Kesi. She would need to spend a considerable amount of time in the barn with her calf.

Luna proved to be an extremely cautious and fiercely protective mother. Now the concern rose that when it was time to join the others, Luna’s training would have been lost, as much time had passed. If Luna did not go to the exhibit again, that meant Kesi would not go either. Fortunately, that was not the case. Luna and Kesi did join the others on exhibit. There were easy days and rough days, but Luna, Kali, and Kesi soon settled into the routine. Kali discovered the feeding platform and some adoring fans. She seemed to have a newfound confidence in herself. Now that the entire herd was in the exhibit, we were ready for the next stage of training.

One step at a time

We began the next phase of training several months in advance. We wanted the site for the future entrance to the new barn to be a very positive place. Initially, we started out by offering browse and roemaine lettuce at the back of the exhibit, directly in front of the new entrance site. This seemed to be too large of a step, as we found that only a few members of the herd would actually walk across the entire exhibit until they knew they would get rewarded. So we decided to break the steps down. We began by offering browse at the side of the exhibit. This area was already established as a positive place for them. We often offered reinforcement in this area, and this was also an area where I performed on exhibit training sessions. Once all of the giraffe were taking browse from this area, we slowly began moving closer to the new entrance site, advancing a small distance each day. At first, we did this every morning. I chose to do it in the morning since the public feeding platform did not open until 9:00 am and we had the herd’s full attention with no competing food interests. We kept records of which giraffe took reinforcement, how long it took for them to approach, and how long the feeding lasted. Once the herd recognised the routine, they would start moving toward us as soon as they saw us approaching the backside of the exhibit. Moving all the way to the new entrance site was a slow process. However, taking our time and being persistent paid off. The giraffe were able to see and hear the ongoing construction while taking reinforcement from keepers. They seemed confident in following us closer and closer to the new area, despite all of the construction activity.

Once they were taking reinforcement near the new entrance site, the frequency of the feedings was increased. The public feeding platform employees would radio a giraffe keeper any time that a few members of the herd were spending time at the back of the exhibit. We would immediately go to the new entrance site and reward them. Although not every giraffe took reinforcement at these times, they were all in the near vicinity. They could observe the situation while being in the comfort of the herd. During this process, the new entrance and chute area to the new barn was completed, and we were poised to take on a new challenge.

The next phase

At this point, the interior of the new barn was not completed. We were able to offer the giraffe access to the chute area while keeping the barn door closed. During this time, they could hear the construction going on inside. We covered as much of the new chute fence as we could with browse. We also filled some of their favourite puzzle feeders and hung them on the chute fence. Not only were these feeders filled with preferred treats, but they were visually familiar items in a foreign space. After some hesitation, several giraffe (lead by Zuri, of course), began
entering the new chute. Keepers were also present with reinforcement to help them feel more secure and to observe their reactions. We did this for several days, until the majority of the herd seemed comfortable spending some time there. This excludes Luna and Kesi, both of whom stood near the new entrance area and observed, but did not follow the others.

We then opened the large outside door to the barn, while keeping the inner “screen” door closed. The giraffe could put their heads in to investigate, but did not yet have full access to the barn. Again, I felt the visually familiar items would play an important role, so we hung more puzzle feeders inside the barn for them to see from a distance. We took brush heads (our bull’s favourite enrichment) from the old barn and secured them in the new barn. We also placed bedding in the stalls. The herd appeared to be comfortable spending time in the entire chute with visual access to the new interior. All construction was completed, supplies had been moved in, and we were ready for the big move.

**Giant leaps of faith**

When the day finally came to give them access to their new barn, we all felt ready. The new facility was filled with familiar items and dripping with delicious browse. We mixed some slightly soiled substrate (from the previous night in the old barn) in with the fresh bedding, hoping to create both visual and olfactory recognition. Because of the great dangers of startling a giraffe (particularly in a new space), only keepers were allowed in the new area. We also knocked every time we entered the new barn, so that if they were by chance inside exploring, they would not be caught off guard. Once given access, the giraffe only seemed mildly intrigued. They would glance inside the new barn, but stayed in the chute area.

Since our bull, Jelani, always demonstrated a brave nature, we decided to work with him first. He readily entered the chute area, and spent some times enjoying treats. But he took one look inside that new barn and wanted nothing to do with it! So, we attempted to let the cows lead the way. We chose to work with just four of the six girls: Zuri, Zahra, Kali, and Mystic. Luna and Kesi had not yet set foot in the chute area at all, and we hoped that seeing the rest of the herd entering the new barn would be a strong motivator for them. This had to be accomplished with some urgency as temperatures were dropping, and our time was greatly limited. Once the girls spent some time in the chute area as usual, I closed and locked the gate to the exhibit. Our plan was that the previous night would have been the very last night they spent at the old barn. I spent a lot of time alone with them, offering reinforcement at the barn door, encouraging them, and never asking them to do anything that made them nervous. There were no other keepers or distractions present. Occasionally, one giraffe would approach and barely poke a nose in. This small progress was greatly encouraging to me. So, I just stayed where I was and kept things simple. In a short time, they went from small movements of progress to giant leaps of faith. Zuri was officially the first giraffe to enter the new facility. She stared inside for a few minutes, and then simply walked inside. She looked around, decided it was safe, and headed toward the hay racks. About ten minutes later, Mystic followed her. She went in and out of the barn several times before settling down alongside Zuri for a snack. Kali was the third giraffe to enter the new barn. Kali, the giraffe that would not leave the old barn for five years, entered a strange, new place and began exploring right away. Seeing the others inside, Zahra simply ran in, seemingly without hesitation. I had four giraffe enter the new barn in less than 90 minutes. I was ecstatic. I observed them carefully all day and let them explore. At the end of the day, I closed the barn door. We left some lights on at night for a couple of weeks until we felt they were familiar with the surroundings.

The next day, we took on our biggest challenge: Luna and Kesi. The first day was fairly uneventful, with neither Luna nor Kesi even entering the chute area. The next morning, I spent some time alone with them near the chute. The outside door to the barn was open, so they could see the other females. To my pleasant surprise, both Luna and Kesi entered the chute and enjoyed some puzzle feeders. I
locked the gate and let them spend some time getting comfortable. Next, we tried letting a couple of the other girls have access to the chute area to encourage Luna and Kesi. We hoped they would follow the others inside. Unfortunately, they would not cross the doorway into the barn. Throughout the day, several keepers worked tirelessly to convince Luna and Kesi to join the others. After many hours, Kesi finally entered the barn and joined the herd. Luna was now alone, a situation which is usually terrifying for a female giraffe. It was the end of a chilly October day, and concern was growing. The other keepers left to attend to other duties, leaving Luna and I alone. I didn’t know if the power of my positive relationship with Luna would be stronger than her fear. Luna had not left the old barn for three years, and I was now asking her to take an enormous risk. The rest of the females were relaxing comfortably in a nearby stall. Everything had settled down, and Luna and I spent some quiet time together. After about ten minutes, Luna took the leap of faith, and joined us in their new home.

Once Jelani saw all of his girls in the new barn, all hesitation was gone. He entered the barn without a second thought. The entire herd was now safe and comfortable. After several months of preparation, within a four-day period, we had moved all seven giraffe. To say that this was an enormous relief for us would be a serious understatement.

Moving forward

We were very careful to make sure that each giraffe became comfortable in the new surroundings. We opened and closed doors slowly. We worked the doors to the tamer as the giraffe looked on. We kept all distractions to a minimum, and developed an indoor shifting/cleaning routine for them. We did not give them access to the aisle way or tamer overnight. There were loud heaters, power pumps and hoses, and new sights and smells for them to adapt to and they settled in beautifully. We were greatly looking forward to all of the training opportunities that the new facility created for us. Once they entered the new barn, the giraffe seemed to be on a roll. After one week, several of them were entering the tamer and taking reinforcement. After two weeks, we were able to get a few weights: something that had never been done with our adult giraffe. While all are at different levels in their training, they have all made enormous progress. Sometimes, we even have to convince Kali to get OUT of the tamer! In February of 2011, we performed our first completely voluntary, unrestrained blood draw on a healthy adult giraffe (that award goes to Kali). The next month, we did our second draw on Jelani. Zuri is currently doing extremely well in her blood draw training. I’ve been able to work with them on hip injections, hoof care, body tactile, and more. They seem to enjoy the new training, and are free to leave the tamer if they choose to do so. All of this is done through positive reinforcement training, and has catapulted our capabilities to provide the absolute best care possible for our giraffe. It has been a growth process that both keepers and giraffe have experienced together. We gave the giraffe the best tools we could to do everything on their own, and they exceeded our expectations. We look forward to the advances that the future will bring, and I feel that my positive relationship with the giraffe is stronger than ever. While much planning and strategy went into this move, absolutely none of it would have been possible without the strong relationships formed between the giraffe and keepers.

Today

Now, two years later, we have made exciting progress in their training. We have done successful, voluntary blood draws on Kali, Jelani, and Zuri. Zuri does so well with blood draws that she is currently in training to allow us to take a significant amount of blood for plasma banking purposes. This will be extremely helpful in the event that a giraffe, at any location, is in emergency need of plasma. We’ve done hoof care on Jelani, Kali and Zuri. Kali also
broke another FWCZ record by being our first voluntary radiograph. We are able to perform radiographs on her front right foot, which is essential in helping us to provide care for her arthritis. We’ve been able to do eye and ear exams, wound treatment, body tactile, ultrasound training and blood draw training on all of our younger giraffe. Due to our new facility, we were able to welcome a new giraffe to our herd in November 2011. Three-year-old bull Ezeji joined us from Indianapolis Zoo. We will have two breeding males, a challenge we could not possibly have taken on in our former facility. The bulls will never be together, or even next to each other. We’ve successfully managed these herd dynamics for the past year, and have confidence for the future. We look forward to learning along with our herd, sharing our passion, and teaching others about giraffe and their wild counterparts.

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**Botswana’s first giraffe research**
Kylie McQualter, University of New South Wales and Giraffe Conservation Foundation

Whilst some ecological information is available for giraffe populations elsewhere in Africa, the giraffe of northern Botswana have, until now, been neglected as a focus of ecological studies. An exciting new collaborative research initiative has brought together the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Elephants without Borders (EWB) and the University of New South Wales to undertake Botswana’s first giraffe ecology research under the umbrella of EWB’s Large Herbivore Ecology Programme.

With giraffe numbers in apparent decline in northern Botswana, particularly in the Okavango Delta region, baseline ecological information is required before appropriate conservation management strategies can be considered. The research will give insight into the ecological requirements, behaviour and conservation status of giraffe populations in two unique ecosystems – the Chobe riverfront and adjacent areas and Wildlife Concession NG26 in the Okavango Delta.

Research is well underway. Aerial wildlife surveys have been conducted across northern Botswana (and another is scheduled for 2013), which will help quantify the short- and long-term changes in density and spatial distribution of giraffe populations to enable valid assessments of their conservation status – information which will be fed directly into the first Africa-wide Giraffe Status Report.

Four GPS satellite head harnesses have been deployed on giraffe cows, three within Chobe National Park and one in NG26, with plans to deploy a further two in NG26. These units will enable a comparison of giraffe movements between the two ecosystems. Programmed to record the giraffe’s locations every four hours, the GPS units will provide invaluable, long-term information about the giraffe’s daily and seasonal movements, home range size, habitat preferences and landscape use – information which would otherwise be almost impossible to attain. Locations of all giraffe observed in the field have been and will continue to be recorded throughout the study, complementing information gathered from the GPS satellite head harnesses. Additional information is also being collected on population demographics, herd composition and diet.

As one of the giraffe strongholds across their range, and with populations reportedly in decline, this research is well overdue. Ecological baseline data collected will prove invaluable in understanding their ecological requirements and threats, and in developing conservation initiatives.

*Photo courtesy of Kelly Landen, EWB*

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Rothschild’s giraffe translocation, Kigio Wildlife Conservancy
James Sarginson & Julie Nissen, Kigio Wildlife Conservancy

We woke up around 6am to prepare for the giraffe capture on Kigio Wildlife Conservancy. The giraffe were to be translocated to Solai Conservancy – some 60km away, near Nakuru, Kenya. After a brief introduction with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) team, the rangers of Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, and volunteers, we set out for the first part of the translocation – to locate the giraffe.

The KWS team consisted of veterinarians, whose job was the safe and professional tranquillisation of the giraffe, and the capture experts – strong and fast men to help bring the giraffe down. Three vehicles set off in separate directions in order to cover the most land possible with radios at hand to advise all when they had been spotted.

Locating the giraffe was relatively easy, but not so the location to tranquilise and capture them safely. Preferably on a flat and wide open plain. We also wanted to make sure we had the most suitable giraffe for translocation, not pregnant or wounded.

Once lined up and darted, the drug began to take effect. Surprisingly, this results in the giraffe running, hence the wide-open plain. The chase was on and slowly the giraffe felt drowsy and stumbled before finally falling to the ground in a tranquil state.

The capture team then swiftly got to the side of the giraffe and held it down, while the others prepare the rope and transport trailer. Once the ropes were properly tied to both the giraffe and the trailer, and a sack had been placed over the head of the animal to minimise stress, the difficult task of getting the giraffe back on its feet began. The team then guided the large beast into the transport trailer – this involved several men on two separate ropes, heaving with all there might as the giraffe struggled to get away.

Once all the giraffe were captured they spent two weeks in a holding pen in Kigio Wildlife Conservancy to prepare them for the long journey along busy roads and through booming cities. You would assume that after the capturing was over that the hard work was basically done, but due to the sensitivity of these wild creatures accidents can occur, even inside the holding pen. Marie, the last giraffe that was captured, suffered a lot of stress inside the holding pen, which ultimately caused her death. Yasmin who was caught to replace Marie, frantically escaped by heaving the large front half of her body over the walls of the pen but thankfully she was not injured.

Yasmin was then replaced by another female named Anya; but not too long after this we suffered yet another fatality, Simon, during relocation from the holding pen to the trailer. Simon after much stress from being in a small pen for three weeks fell down, which caused another giraffe to panic, who then accidently stepped on Simon’s leg. After struggling to get back up Simon passed out as he and the others were being loaded on the trailer. The KWS veterinarians decided that he would not regain consciousness and that the most humane thing to do was to euthanize him – unfortunately unexpected things can happen when working with wild animals. Rasmusi was then caught to replace Simon, this time the KWS decided not to wait any longer and transported Rasmusi, Anya, and the unidentified giraffe the very next day.

The three giraffe arrived safely in their new destination and Kigio Wildlife Conservancy is to be commended for their role in introducing this endangered giraffe (sub)species to new ranges in Kenya.

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Update from the field
Francois Deacon, University of the Free State

This is just a very brief update from my PhD research in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. I am happy to report that almost nine months after collaring all giraffe are doing well. I am getting more excited as all the effort, time and money is coming together to form a successful project. Our progress is good. We have already collected more than 12,000 readings containing information on time, temperature, distance, speed etc. The distances the herds move and the interaction between herds are remarkable.

We visit the herds every two weeks, and do 14 days observations at a time. The observations also address my questions on feeding behaviour and habitat preference, and includes information such as feeding height, time spent eating, species preference etc. There are distinctions made between cows, bulls, sub-adults and younger animals. These observations are taken every 5 minutes from sunrise to sunset. I camp and stay in the field close to the herds – however, lion are becoming more of a problem. I also regularly survey more than 60 plant survey plots, undertake phenology monitoring and collect manure for analysis.

I have compiled a table and some maps summarising the results of the first six months after the collaring in April. The giraffe have been named after the sponsors of the GPS collars – I would like to use this opportunity to thank all sponsors for their support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Total movement (km)</th>
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<td>Kempff</td>
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<td>Piet</td>
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<td>David</td>
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<td>Kerneels</td>
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Gestion Concertée des Ressources Naturelles de la Zone de Concentration des Girafes au Niger (PGCRN/ZCGN), l’ONG ATPF s’engage
Zoumari Salifou, Direction Générale de l’Environnement et des Eaux et Forêt, Niger

Situated in the south-west part of Niger between the coordinates 13°14’ and 13°27’ of latitude North and 002°30’ and 002°52’ of longitude East, the zone of intervention of the project is at the actual time the unique area of distribution of the last giraffes of Africa of the West. It makes of zone of transition of the Reserve of Biosphère Transfrontalière du W Niger (RTBW/N) and, is at a hundred kilometers to the East of Niamey. Two (2) types of formations vegetales se distinguent sur le site: la brousse tigree and the agro forestiers to dominance Acacia albida, source of nouriture for the girafes during the season.

Source : ONG ATPF, 2012

The state of degradation of the zone of Transition of the Reserve of Biosphère Transfrontalière of the region of the W Niger communally called zone girafe is today inquired as it attests the results of the ecologic and environmental conduits in the zone.

In effect a study on the evaluation of the viability of the giraffes mened in 2006 by a team of consultants of the ECOPAS souligne que « les probabilités d’extinction du seul noyau existant de la population de la girafe au Niger à l’espace de cent (100) ans montrent un fort risque d’extinction lié à la perte d’habitat et aux événuelles catastrophes ». Par conséquent force est de constater que les girafes sont aujourd’hui fortement menacées par l’effet conjugué des actions anthropiques et climatiques cela en dépit des multiples interventions antérieures dont a bénéficié la zone. Et cette situation qui ne cesse d’augmenter impose la nécessité de repenser les approches et stratégies mises en œuvre jusqu’ici.


L’atelier de lancement dudit projet s’est tenu le 14 juillet 2012 dans la commune rurale de Harikanassou sous la présidence effective du maire de cette commune et la participation significative des autorités communales des cinq (5) communes concernées par la zone de concentration des girafes au Niger à savoir Kouré Harikanassou, Ngonga, Fakara Dantchandou appuyées par la présence notoire des directeurs départementaux de l’environnement de Boboye and de Kollo.

Photo de famille des participants à l’atelier de lancement du Projet

D’un coût global de 308 834 Euro, ce projet d’une durée de trois (03) ans sera piloté par l’ONG Aménagement des Terroirs et Productions Forestières et vise à :

- promouvoir la Conservation de la girafe dans sa zone de prédilection (plateau de kouré et Dallol Bosso), par l’instauration des mécanismes concitados de gestion des ressources naturelles et l’amélioration des revenus des populations locales.

De façon concrète, il s’agira principalement pour l’ONG ATPF et l’UICN de mener les activités suivantes :

- renforcement des capacités des collectivités et communautés concernées par le projet,
- mise en œuvre des actions d’aménagement et de restauration de la giration
- appui au développement d’activités génératrices de revenus au profit des femmes.
- Construction de 9 bacs à ciment avec installation de panneaux solaires au profit des patronnaires pour...
diminuer l’utilisation abusive du bois vert dans la zone

- Délimitation et aménagement d’un corridor de 20 km de long pour permettre aux girafes d’aller s’abrever du plateau de kouré à la mare de zogaré ect.

Présenté par le Chargé de Programme de l’ONG ATPF, l’ensemble de ces actions a été salué par les participants à l’atelier qui ont souhaité de poursuivre l’implication effective des communautés locales dans la gestion du projet et l’articulation entre les plans de développement communaux et les interventions du PGCRN/ZCGN;

En somme, l’atelier s’est terminé sur une note de satisfaction totale des participants.

Et, pour conclure, le maire de la commune de Harikanasou, président de la réunion, a insisté sur l’engagement de l’ensemble des acteurs pour la réussite du projet.

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**Giraffe Conservation Status Report – Country Profile: Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Andri Marais, Stephanie Fennessy & Julian Fennessy, Giraffe Conservation Foundation

As already introduced in *Giraffa* Vol. 6(1) 2012, GCF has commenced an exciting project in order to establish the current status of all giraffe populations and (sub)species throughout the African continent to support and appropriately inform their conservation and management.

The project intends to gather data on giraffe numbers and range from across their distribution and to furthermore develop an integrated giraffe database working collaboratively with African governments, NGOs, Universities and researchers. The subsequent analysis of data, findings and production of GIS range maps will facilitate the publishing of the first ever detailed reports on the giraffe conservation status in Africa. This project will provide an invaluable framework and the necessary base for possible future giraffe research and conservation management to be conducted across the continent.

As a first step GCF is developing country profiles based on desktop research for each African giraffe range State. For these profiles we aim to collate all historical and currently available census and anecdotal data on numbers and distribution of as well as threats to giraffe (sub)species in order to gain a greater understanding of giraffe numbers and their conservation status. These profiles will gradually be published on the GCF website (http://www.giraffeconservation.org/prj_downloads.php?cid=247&prjid=25).

So far, five country profiles are available, namely on Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Rwanda. As an example, read this country profile for the DRC here.

**Country:** Democratic Republic of the Congo

**Sub-region:** Central Africa

**General statistics**
Size of country: 2,345,410 km²
Size of protected areas / percentage protected area coverage: 11%

**(Sub)species**
Kordofan giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*)

**Conservation Status**
IUCN Red List (IUCN 2012):
*Giraffa camelopardalis* (as a species) – least concern
*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum* – not assessed separately

**In the Democratic Republic of the Congo:**
Giraffes are classified by the Congolese Wildlife Authority, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), as a rare or endangered species that is fully protected and may consequently not be killed.

**Issues/threats**
Giraffes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are restricted to the Garamba National Park and adjacent hunting reserves in the north east of the country (Amube *et al.* 2009; De Merode *et al.* 2000; East 1999). Garamba National Park is one of the oldest national parks in Africa and borders South Sudan on the Congo-Nile watershed (De Merode *et al.* 2000). Since 2005, the park has been managed by African Parks in partnership with the national government conservation authority, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN).
The park has faced many challenges, several of which have been related to Central Africa’s turbulent political landscape (Cunliffe 2010a; Amube et al. 2009; Hillman Smith et al. 2005; Hillman Smith 2004; Hillman Smith et al. 2003a).

The civil war in (South) Sudan led to an influx of weapons, military deserters and refugees into the DRC (Hillman Smith et al. 2003a). Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels operated within the confines of Garamba National Park during the 1990s and decimated animal populations (Hillman-Smith et al. 2005; Hillman-Smith et al. 2003b). In 1997 the liberation war in the DRC precipitated another upsurge of illegal hunting in Garmaba National Park as game guards were disarmed and anti-poaching was curtailed for several months (Hillman Smith et al. 2003a). In 2005 the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a guerrilla group from northern Uganda, also established a base in the park in order to escape the Ugandan army (ACF 2012; Cunliffe 2010a,b). The LRA remained in the park until a Ugandan-led military offensive drove them out in 2009 (Cunliffe 2010a).

Illegal hunting has been aggravated by the uncontrolled flow of weapons and ammunition resulting from the political unrest (Amube et al. 2009; Hillman Smith et al. 2003a). Not only have soldiers, guerrilla fighters and refugees killed thousands of animals for food, but commercial poachers have also been active in the park since the 1970s (Cunliffe 2010a). Illegal hunters from (South) Sudan have been involved in supplying meat for the commercial bush trade (Hillman Smith et al. 2003a) and since 2004, illegal hunting by large groups of Arab horseman from (South) Sudan have further decimated wildlife populations (Hillman-Smith et al. 2005). Interestingly, the Mondo tribe living in the Mondo Missa Hunting Reserve adjacent to Garamba National Park believed that consuming giraffe meat caused leprosy and, in the past, this reduced poaching incidents among the tribe (African Parks 2012). However, according to Amube et al. (2009), these traditional beliefs have largely died out with the influence of modern society. However, possession of giraffe tail hair is of great social status to the Mondo traditional chiefs and hence illegal hunting still prevails to ascertain these (Amube et al. 2009). A decline in wildlife populations is furthermore linked to post war instability, power struggles and exploitation of resources, particularly from neighbouring countries (Hillman-Smith et al. 2005).

In 2012, another LRA base camp was discovered within Garamba National Park (ACF 2012; RNW 2012). At the time of writing, the security situation in Garamba had stabilised with the assistance of the Congo military (FARDC) and UN Special Forces (MONUSCO) who temporarily moved in and once again managed to drive LRA operatives out (ACF 2012). It is believed that the LRA retreated to the densely forested Azande Hunting Reserve north-west of Garamba, however, it is expected that they will return to the park unless an ongoing military presence is secured (ACF 2012).

**Estimate population abundance and trends**

Taxonomic confusion has surrounded the (sub)species occurrence of giraffe in Central Africa (Hassanin et al. 2007). The giraffe population of the DRC were formerly recognised as a separate (sub)species, the Congo giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis congoensis), but G. c. congoensis has been subsumed into G. c. antiquorum (Fennessy 2008). However, further genetic sampling and analysis of the DRC giraffe population, along with other giraffe from the region, is needed to confirm this assumption.

**Historic**

Records of the occurrence of giraffe in the DRC are limited to the Garamba complex. The Garamba complex consists of Garamba National Park and three adjacent hunting reserves: Azande to the west, Gangala na Bodio to the south and Mondo Missa to the east (Amube et al. 2009; De Merode et al. 2000; East 1999). Kordofan giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum) were formerly widespread in the southern part of the park (East 1999). The presence of a large elephant population has opened the habitat over the last few decades resulting in giraffe largely moving into the peripheries of the park and the adjacent reserves, where woodland density is higher (Amube et al. 2009; De Merode et al. 2000; East 1999).

De Seager (1958) suggested that giraffe were common in the south-eastern sector of the park and extended as far north as the DRC-South Sudan border. Giraffe were reported to be quite rare in the western parts of the park where they were severely hunted by local communities (De Seager 1958). Dagg (1962) estimated the occurrence of some 300 Kordofan giraffe in Garamba National Park and some 60 individuals in Gangala na Bodio Hunting Reserve. Verschuren (1975) estimated a population of approximately 300 giraffe to occur in the entire Garamba complex.

The first aerial census of Garamba National Park, carried out in 1976, estimated the giraffe population at 350 individuals (Savidge et al. 1976). In 1983, an aerial census estimated the occurrence of some 175 giraffe inside Garamba National Park, and another 20 giraffe in the adjacent hunting reserves (Hillman et al. 1983). An aerial

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1 Although East (1999) referred to G. c. peralta, G. c. antiquorum and G. c. congoensis collectively as western giraffe, G. c. congoensis has been subsumed into G. c. antiquorum (Fennessy 2008) and is now assumed to be Kordofan giraffe as referred to throughout this document.
census carried out in 1984 revealed estimates of some 237 giraffe, while census data for 1986 indicated an estimated giraffe population of approximately 153 individuals (K. Hillman-Smith pers. comm.).

Recent

Although giraffe population numbers have always been relatively low, they have plummeted to only a few individuals over the past few decades (African Parks 2012). Some 345 giraffe were estimated to occur in Garamba National Park in 1993 (African Parks 2012); this number decreased to an estimated 178 individuals in 1995 (Hillman-Smith et al. 2003; Smith et al. 2000).

In 1998, an aerial survey of the Garamba complex estimated a population of 144 giraffe (Hillman-Smith et al. 2003; Smith et al. 2000). A further decline in population numbers led to an estimated 118 individuals by the new millennium (Hillman-Smith et al. 2003). However, giraffe numbers continued to decline and aerial surveys conducted in 2002 and 2003 estimated the giraffe population at a mere 62 individuals (Hillman-Smith et al. 2003).

During an aerial census in 2006, a total of 70 giraffe were counted of which 52 occurred in southern Garamba National Park, including a small strip of Azande, and a further 18 in Gangala na Bodio (Emslie et al. 2006).

Current

Currently, giraffe are concentrated in the southern sector of Garamba National Park and in areas that extend to the Mondo Missa and Gangala na Bodio Hunting Reserves (Amube et al. 2009). Aerial counts of the southern part of the park and adjacent hunting reserves in 2007 indicated that approximately 85 individuals remain in the area (Amube et al. 2009), while African Parks (2012) reported approximately 70 individuals roaming the park.

In summary, current giraffe numbers for the DRC are estimated at <80 Kordofan giraffe, found exclusively in the Garamba National Park and adjacent hunting reserves.

Future Conservation Management

The following are proposed conservation management options for giraffe in the DRC:

- Anti-poaching efforts to conserve the population;
- Development of National Giraffe Strategy for the DRC;
- Support to dedicated giraffe conservation, habitat protection, education and awareness initiatives (government, NGO and academic).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Marina Mônico for her assistance. This study was financially supported by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and Blank Park Zoo.

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**Citation**


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Tall Tales

Leg-lifting: A new fighting style documented among Masai and Reticulated giraffe

While working on their photographic book about giraffe, Giraffe Reflections (University of California Press, in press for 2013), wildlife photographer Karl Ammann and author Dale Peterson first saw, among male Masai giraffes in the Masai Mara, a strange behaviour that they called 'leg-lifting'. This seems to be a form of sparring or fighting among males—a kind of giraffe jujitsu where one male attempts to unbalance and topple the other with a surprise lift and twist of the leg. It appears that the behaviour has not previously been photographed or written about. Karl Ammann subsequently photographed similar leg-lifting behavior among reticulated giraffes in Samburu. (Images by Karl Ammann)

Curious incident of a dead giraffe

A curious incident of a deceased giraffe has reopened the question of whether animals mourn their dead. Zoologists have witnessed a giraffe mother investigating and refusing to leave the body of her dead calf, the third such incident on record.

Other social animals such as elephants and chimpanzees are known to investigate their dead, especially the bodies of their close relatives. Such behaviour raises the prospect that animals have a "mental model" of death. Details of the latest incident are published in the African Journal of Ecology.

Zoologist Professor Fred Bercovitch studies on behalf of the Primate Research Institute and Wildlife Research Centre at Kyoto University, Japan and the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, based in Purley, Surrey, UK. While tracking Thornicroft's giraffes in the South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, Prof Bercovitch witnessed a female giraffe splay her legs and bend down to her newborn, but dead calf. She spent several minutes licking the calf, before standing upright. She then repeated the behaviour a few times, spending more than two hours in total investigating the body of her lost offspring. The behaviour is striking for a number of reasons. Females giraffes rarely spend any time alone, yet this individual spent hours with her dead calf away from other females. Giraffes rarely splay their legs to bend down, apart from when to drink or feed. And apart from two other similar incidences, giraffes have not been seen intensively investigating their dead.

"The maternal reaction to her dead offspring was not as prolonged as that shown by African elephants," Prof Bercovitch writes in the journal.

Elephants and chimpanzees, which both live in highly social groups, have been seen apparently mourning the loss of their kind. Elephants become agitated when a member of the herd dies, investigate dead conspecifics and often guard the bodies. Chimps and snub-nosed monkeys have been recorded carrying dead offspring, often carrying older babies for longer. But it is worth noting, Prof Bercovitch says, that there also appears to be a gradient in the way giraffes react to their dead. Of the three incidents so far recorded, one female giraffe spent four days alongside the dead body of her older calf. That took place in 2010 in the Sosambu Conservancy in Kenya, dubbed "The curious incident of the giraffe in the night." There, biologist Zoe Muller observed a Rothschild’s giraffe stand guard over her one month old calf that had just died. Seventeen other female giraffes surrounded the body at various times during the four days.
In the incident in Zambia, witnessed late last year by Prof Bercovitch, the Thornicroft’s giraffe spent two hours with her apparently stillborn offspring. The final incident occurred in 2011, when a herd of Namibian giraffes stopped to inspect a site where a young female giraffe had died three weeks earlier. A male giraffe stopped walking, splayed his legs and sniffed at the ground. Four other herd members investigated the site in the same way. However, while the behaviour of elephants and primates has been used to suggest that some mammals are capable of conceptualising death, Prof Bercovitch remains cautious. The incidents clearly show that giraffe mothers bond with their calves in a more pronounced way than realised, he says. But the importance of the discovery may also lie more in that it widens the number of species that react when relatives or members of their own kind die. Only by collecting evidence from a range of species can scientists begin to investigate whether animals do mourn, and when in evolution the trait appeared.

Matt Walker, BBC Nature Editor. This article was reprinted from http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/19317067

Giraffe-boy in South Africa

The giraffe-boy has resurrected the tradition of his British ancestor - for RIDING giraffes. Living in a South African farm gave 17-year-old Shandor Larenty the opportunity to raise cute baby giraffe, Mara who had been sadly abandoned by her parents.

Now following in his British ancestor's footsteps, the South African lad, who lives at the Lion Park near Johannesburg, is training himself and his giraffe best friend to perform the feat of a human riding a giraffe in what could be the first time in generations.

Pictures also show Shandor being greeted by his second giraffe pet as he arrives home in his car – 18 foot-tall adult Purdy. Shandor and Purdy even enjoy an outdoor breakfast together, with Shandor relaxing while Purdy eats his favourite snack - vegetable pellets - from his hand.

Shandor’s Great Uncle Terry was a circus performer in the 1950's Chipperfield, Hertfordshire and the only person known at the time to have the ability to ride a giraffe.

This article was reprinted from http://english.cntv.cn/20120913/106956.shtml
Home at last

In the August 2011 issue of Africa Geographic we told you about an octet of giraffes that sailed across Kenya’s Lake Baringo to a new home. It was a story that touched the hearts of many readers, so we asked its author, Zoe Muller, to give us an update on how these gentle animals are progressing.

The shores of Lake Baringo were once the ancestral home of the Rothschild’s giraffe – indeed, the subspecies was previously known as the Baringo giraffe. When eight of these animals were shipped across the lake to Ruko Conservancy in February 2011, it was hoped they would resettle an area their predecessors had once roamed. So how are these pioneers faring?

All eight giraffes settled quickly into their new surroundings, apparently unperturbed by the long journey. At first they stuck together in two groups of four – interestingly, the same groups in which they had crossed the lake. There could be a number of reasons for this, but many people like to believe that a strong bond developed between shipmates. Almost two years later the bond appears to have dissolved and the eight now intermingle freely with one another and go about doing typically giraffe things: browsing on trees, ruminating in the sunshine and wandering around looking graceful.

As a representative of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, which aims to protect and conserve all giraffe subspecies across Africa, I am keeping a close eye on these Baringo giraffes. Unbeknown to them, they hold the key to the subspecies’ homecoming. It’s quite a responsibility for such calm, gentle and unassuming creatures, but already they are on track – two of the females are pregnant!

Zoe Muller, Rothschild’s Giraffe Project & GCF. This article was reprinted from Africa Geographic, December 2012.

South Sudan’s elephants face extinction: experts

A picture released by the Wildlife Conservation Society shows a herd of giraffe running through the Bandiglio National park in 2011. Elephant, giraffe and zebra in the world’s newest nation South Sudan could soon be extinct due to rampant poaching and trafficking, conservation experts warned Tuesday.

Elephant, giraffe and zebra in the world’s newest nation South Sudan could soon be extinct due to rampant poaching and trafficking, conservation experts warned Tuesday. Ironically, animals in South Sudan’s vast wildernesses had been largely protected by almost five decades of civil war, despite poaching by rebels. The war stifled development and preserved the largest intact savannah in East Africa, according to the United States-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). But war also left the fledgling nation awash with guns, and in the years since a 2005 peace deal, increasingly organised armed groups are trafficking ivory and killing animals for food.

The elephant population, estimated at 130,000 in 1986, has crashed to 5,000 if South Sudan is "lucky", WCS director in South Sudan Paul Elkan told reporters. "Within the next five years, they could completely be gone with the current rates of poaching," Elkan said, adding that even security forces are "involved in trafficking."

South Sudan’s animal migration is one of the largest in Africa, potentially topping in size even the world famous Maasai Mara and Serengeti migrations between Tanzania and Kenya, WCS said. But the wildlife faces major challenges. "Other species such as the zebra may already be gone, the rhino is probably already gone, giraffes are on the way out, so commercial bush meat also needs to be brought under control", Elkan added. But a lack of laws and weak institutions prevent poachers and traffickers who are caught from being brought to book. "We have apprehended so many poachers, caught red handed ... but because of this legal vacuum it is very difficult to prosecute them", said Gabriel Changson Chang, the country’s wildlife, conservation and tourism minister.

This article was reprinted from http://www.france24.com/en/20121204-south-sudan-elephants-face-extinction-experts

Giraffes in zoos may lack enough fat for cold weather: experts

Giraffes should not be kept in colder climates because they may lack enough fat to stay warm, some experts said as the latest death of a giraffe at the Greater Vancouver Zoo led to an outcry from animal groups.

Jafari, a 12-year-old giraffe, was found dead in his heated barn Sunday morning. He was the third giraffe to die in the past year at the zoo in Aldergrove. Last November, a 23-year-old female giraffe named Eleah died just three
days after her only offspring, three-year-old Amryn. The BC SPCA said Tuesday it will investigate. Only one giraffe — five-year-old Pomy — is left at the zoo. It is too early to draw conclusions about how Jafari died, but some experts are concerned that cold weather compounded by dietary issues may have been a factor.

For years, scientists have been stumped by the sudden deaths of giraffes at zoos. But a recent study has linked the deaths to cold weather and a lack of fat, said Dr. Anne Daag, a zoologist at the University of Waterloo who has written several books on giraffes and spent a year in Africa studying them in their natural habitat. Daag said the main problem is that giraffes are used to browsing all day on the leaves of the tall and spiny acacia tree. An adult giraffe can typically eat up to 34 kilograms of the leaves in a day. She noted that many zoos are unable to provide enough of those leaves and often mix the diet of their giraffes with hay or other animal feed. As a result, giraffes then lack the balance of nutrients, including calcium and phosphorous, needed to create enough fat to survive in the cold weather, she said. She said researchers were studying why seemingly healthy giraffes were suddenly dying and concluded that they didn’t have enough fat around their cells. “If they are in a cold climate they can die,” said Daag. Asked if the Greater Vancouver Zoo should keep giraffes in this cooler climate, Daag said: “Probably not.”

A New Zealand report, published in the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine in 2005, studied the sudden deaths of five giraffes over eight years at the Auckland zoo. It concluded that all were fed good quantities of the acacia leaves, but that was supplemented by alfalfa hay and commercial supplements. Yet the giraffes, which all died in the winter months, were found with low fat reserves during necropsies. The authors concluded that there was a link between low-energy reserves and high-energy demand in colder temperatures, and suggested that low blood sugar could be the cause of a sudden collapse.

Although it could take several weeks to get necropsy results on Jafari, Peter Fricker, a spokesman with the Vancouver Humane Society, raised concerns Tuesday that the results would, again, be inconclusive. “To just say ‘we’ve done a necropsy and it’s inconclusive’ is not good enough,” said Fricker. “(Zoo officials) need to be held accountable and if they can’t figure out what is wrong then they need to get a specialist to help them figure it out.”

On Tuesday, a spokeswoman for a Canadian organization that monitors zoos called on the Greater Vancouver Zoo to immediately transfer Pomy, the lone survivor, to a warmer climate. “They are social animals and they normally live in herds. And they need to be in a warmer climate with a lot of trees,” said Julie Woodyer, campaign manager for Zoocheck Canada. She said the zoo has tried to recreate the giraffe habitat but that it was “sub-standard,” and she argued that giraffes are particularly sensitive to cold, damp weather.

Woodyer said the zoo’s argument that its giraffes animals were born in captivity in Canada was “ridiculous” because they are not domesticated animals and evolved to eat a certain diet in a specific climate. “Giraffes are dropping dead like there’s no tomorrow. There hasn’t been attention to the issue. People paid attention to elephants. But with giraffes no one is noticing.” Elephants and hippo are also vulnerable to the cold weather and should not be living in Canadian zoos, added Wooyder.

Jody Henderson, a spokeswoman for the zoo, refused Tuesday to respond to questions including what the giraffes are fed, how much space they have to roam, and whether new giraffes will be brought to the zoo. “I’m not really happy with you guys today,” said Henderson, citing her displeasure with a Vancouver Sun photographer showing up unannounced seeking to take photos of the last giraffe and the habitat, while noting other media stayed away Tuesday.

Both Zoocheck and the Vancouver Humane Society are urging the zoo to stop breeding and importing exotic animals and to convert the zoo into a conservation facility for animals that are native to cooler climates. The BC SPCA is investigating to determine whether the giraffe who died Sunday was properly cared for at the zoo. Lorie Chortyk, a spokeswoman for the BC SPCA, said the organization is reviewing the situation to make sure there was no neglect. She added that the SPCA is also checking the health of the zoo’s one remaining giraffe. Chortyk said the investigation will require results from Jafari’s necropsy.

Giraffes typically live for about 25 years in the wild.

Tiffany Crawford, Vancouver Sun. This article was reprinted from http://www.vancouversun.com/travel/Giraffes+zoos+lack+enough+cold+weather+experts/7507587/story.html

Press statement from Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism on suspension of hunting by 2014, Republic of Botswana – Office of the President

As was confirmed by His Excellency the President in his recent State of the Nation Address, Government has decided to indefinitely suspend commercial hunting of wildlife in public or Controlled Hunting Areas as from the 1st of January 2014. This comes as a realization that the shooting of wild game purely for sport and trophies is no longer seen to be compatible with either our national
commitment to conserve and preserve local fauna or the long term growth of the local tourism industry.

Therefore and in light of various enquiries that have been received from members of the public since the above announcement, the following statement is meant to provide further background on the motive and implementation of the suspension.

The decision to impose this moratorium on hunting was made in the context of a growing concern about the sharp decline in the populations of most of the wildlife species that have been subject to licensed hunting. If left unchecked this decline poses a genuine threat to both the conservation of our natural heritage and the long term health of the local tourist industry which currently ranks second to diamonds in terms of its revenue earnings.

Besides contributing to the conservation of wildlife it is anticipated that, in keeping with international trends, the moratorium on hunting will further facilitate the sustainable growth of the tourism sector, as hunting zones are converted into photographic areas.

It may be noted here that while hunting is a seasonal activity, meaning that its contribution to the tourism sector and hence national revenue has also been seasonal and minimal, photographic tourism is conducted year round. Moreover, photographic tourism has virtually no potential for any negative impact on local wildlife populations and hence sustainable.

Finally, it may be also noted that Government’s decision to indefinitely suspend commercial hunting by non release of any annual hunting quotas, will not for the time being affect its ability to continue to issue special game licences on a limited basis for traditional hunting by some local communities within designated wildlife management areas etc. Government will thus continue to assess individual cases for special game licenses.

30 November 2012

Observation: 3 year old giraffe suckling

At Kigio Wildlife Conservancy, researchers recently observed the following incident: Rasmus, a male giraffe approximately three years old, started suckling from Oliva, an eight year old female, who was approximately twelve months pregnant at the time of observation. Olivia allowed Rasmus to suckle for about one minute before gently pushing him away. Rasmus and Olivia had been observed together once before.

Teaching some tricks

When observing a running giraffe in Thornybush Game Lodge in South Africa, Italian Chef and AFGA Field Guide Fausto Ciardo finally understood where his fellow countryman Valentino Rossi had learned an important trick to make him such a successful motorcycle racer. But see for yourself ...
Recently published research


Various game farmers struggle to find the balance between stocking rate and stocking with suitable species. This statement is in particular true if natural resources are explored and utilised. This study was conducted on a wildlife estate located in the grassland biome of the central Free State. Despite being located within the grassland biome, the vegetation can in part be classified as riparian thicket with an abundance of Acacia karroo, *Seasion lancea, Olea europaea, Diospyros lycioides* and *Ziziphus mucronata* trees. In common with many game ranches in the region some game species were not historically present and it is thus essential to study their adaptation and impact on their introduced habitat. The objectives of the study were to evaluate the movement and the impact of *Giraffa camelopardalis* (giraffe) on the woody plants of the estate.

The species composition, density, height distribution, productivity and condition of woody plants influence the browsing capacity of such areas, and needs to be assessed for application in management programs. Vegetation data was collected over a period of 18 months and involved an estimate of the browsing capacity of the woody plants with the aid of the BECVOL 3 model and the calculation of the browsing capacity based on the leaf and shoot production of the trees on a maximum browsing height of 5.0 m. Movements of the eight giraffes on the estate were monitored for a period of three months by fitting one of the animals with a GPS satellite collar.

The browsing capacity of the estate was estimated at 7.7 ha BU-1 for September (month with the lowest browse availability due to the deciduous nature of some of the tree species) (1 BU = the metabolic equivalent of a kudu with a body mass of 140 kg). Based on this estimate, the estate can only support 26 BU during September without the need for supplementary feeding. At the time it was estimated that all the browsers on the estate represented 70 BU, thus exceeding the browsing capacity by 44 BU.

The eight giraffe comprised 42 BU of the 70 BU, the remainder being made up by species such as kudu, nyala and impala. The effect of this overstocking was clearly visible, with tree species such as *A. karroo* showing signs of heavy browsing and broken branches, which will ultimately result in the severe degradation of the browse resource and potential loss of animals. It was also observed that the giraffe do not feed only on the plant material above 2 metres, but that browse material at lower heights is also intensively utilized. This brings the giraffe in direct competition with smaller browsers that can feed only on lower strata. These results emphasize the importance of balancing the stocking rate with the browsing capacity to ensure proper management that will optimise the production of the animals as well as ensure the sustainable utilization of the browse resource.


Numerous factors like continuous habitat reduction or fragmentation for free-ranging giraffes (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) as well as e.g. suboptimal housing conditions for animals in captivity might lead to behavioural alterations as part of the overall adaptation process to the changing living conditions. In order to facilitate current and future studies on giraffe behaviour, a comprehensive ethogram was compiled based on existing literature, as well as observations on giraffes in the wild (Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe; Entabeni Game Reserve, South Africa), and in captivity (National Zoological Gardens of South Africa, Pretoria).

The resulting ethogram lists 65 different behavioural patterns, which were described and grouped into seven categories: General activities, Abnormal repetitive behaviours, General interactions, Bull-Cow behaviour, Bull-Bull behaviour, Cow-Bull behaviour, Maternal behaviours, and Interactions by calves. The behaviours were further described regarding a presumed purpose, particularly with respect to social interactions and sexual behaviour. Contradictory descriptions from previous studies were considered and discussed in comparison with our own observations.

This ethogram provides a basis for current and future studies by suggesting a terminology which can be used for harmonizing behavioural observations, thus helping to facilitate comparability of future results. Subsequently, a better understanding of the behavioural ecology of giraffes in the wild as well as in captivity could aid future conservation efforts.


Note and Records.

Although lions Panthera leo are the main predators of the giraffe Giraffa camelopardalis, interactions between these species are rarely observed directly. As a consequence, little is known about the effects of lions on giraffe mortality and behavior. We test patterns of lion predation on Masai giraffes Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi using a new methodology: lion claw marks observable on the skin of live giraffes. We studied 702 individually known giraffes in 3 non-neighboring areas of Serengeti National Park, Tanzania between August 2008 and November 2010. Lion claw marks were observed on 13% of giraffes older than 1 year. Claw marks were most frequently detected on giraffe hindquarters and flanks, revealing that non-lethal lion attacks occur most often from the rear.

No claw marks were observed on calves (0–1 year), suggesting that calves rarely survive lion attacks. In the adult age class (>5 years), claw-mark prevalence was significantly higher among females than males. We observed substantial variation in claw-mark prevalence across study areas, indicating that lion predation risk may be heterogeneous within Serengeti. We find that claw marks are an important source of data on interactions between lions and giraffes.