

Adopt-a-Giraffe

Desert dwelling giraffe of north-western Namibia

Quarterly Update – January 2018



Our last *Quarterly Update – October 2017* brought you news from the beginning of the hot-dry season in north-western Namibia. Over the last few months this heat has intensified to such a degree that we currently rarely observe giraffe under the direct sun during the hottest hours of the day. Like many of the other animals of the Namib Desert, desert-dwelling giraffe choose to browse in the early morning and late afternoon to avoid the heat. This leaves them free to rest in the shade under the wide canopy of a large Ana Tree (*Faidherbia albida*) or Acacia (*Vachellia erioloba*) when the sun is at its hottest.

For the researchers, this activity pattern has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the giraffe are moving less in the middle of the day so they are easier to photograph and identify. On the other hand, the giraffe tend to congregate together in large groups under trees that offer the best shade. In this way, they create a muddle of legs, necks and spots that can be tricky to disentangle!



Despite the heat however we are happy to say that the giraffe population is looking healthy and we have spotted some of our adopted giraffe amongst the many groups and individuals we have recorded since October.

Despite our many surveys over the past three months **Kunene** has remained elusive. In October we suggested that, as **Kunene** does not have a calf, perhaps she has travelled further afield in search of browse. This may well explain why we haven't seen her recently. There are also many small river



tributaries and rocky canyons that we cannot reach and that she could be spending time in. Additionally, we have been very excited by the results of one of our giraffe tracking units which has shown a female giraffe leaving the Hoarusib River and making her way 75km north through rocky and difficult terrain. It is of course possible that **Kunene** is one of the giraffe that may have accompanied her on this adventure and we hope to find out more very soon!

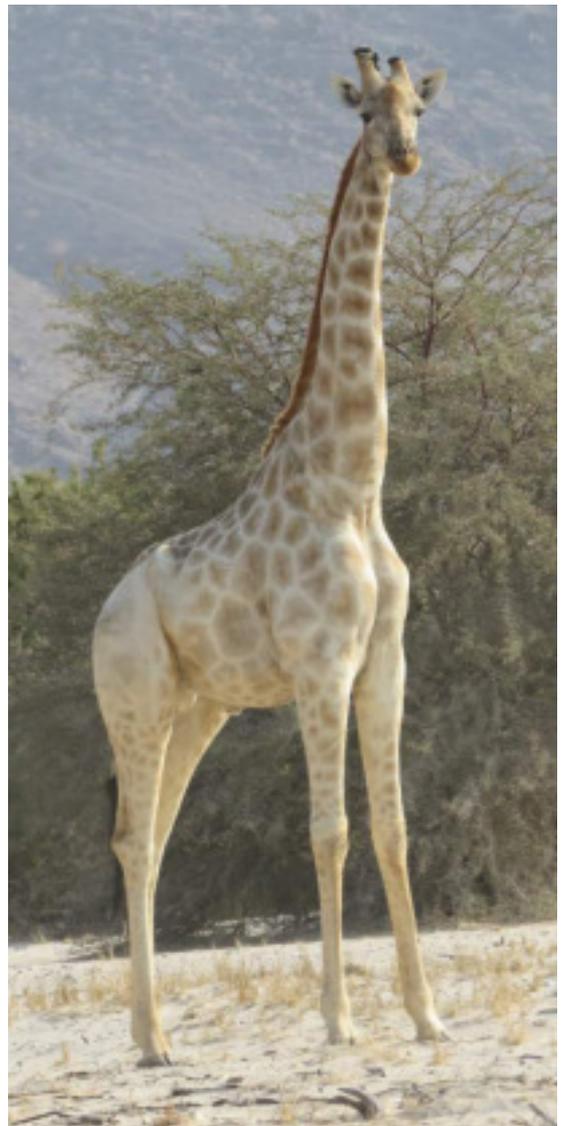
Kaoko however has been spending the hot-dry season in her familiar stretch of the Hoarusib River. As you can see in her photo she is a real beauty with a long flowing tail, light spot pattern and perfect tapered ossicones! **Kaoko** has been spending her time with a mixed group of male and female giraffe, browsing on Mustard Bush (*Salvadora persica*) along the riverbanks. As she seems like quite a social giraffe we are excited to see the results of our social network analysis and genetic studies that might allow us to understand why she spends time with certain other giraffe and who her friends and family are. However, we are still collecting important data and may have to wait two more years to see these exciting results!



Monkey too has chosen to spend the hot-dry season in the Hoarusib River. As always, she is full of character and it is difficult to catch her at a quiet moment to take a photo! However, she seems to have forgiven us for taking her DNA sample with the remote biopsy dart six months ago and is now happy for us to approach her quite closely in the vehicle again. We are keeping an eye on all our younger females in the Adopt-A-Giraffe programme to see when they might show signs of pregnancy or whether they will take another year or two before they have their first calf. It is important to study and record this information so that we can better understand the dynamics of this unique population of giraffe. **Monkey** was first added to our database in July 2016 as an adult giraffe so we assume she is now approximately six years of age. As giraffe often produce offspring from the age of four it is quite possible that it will be **Monkey's** turn next!



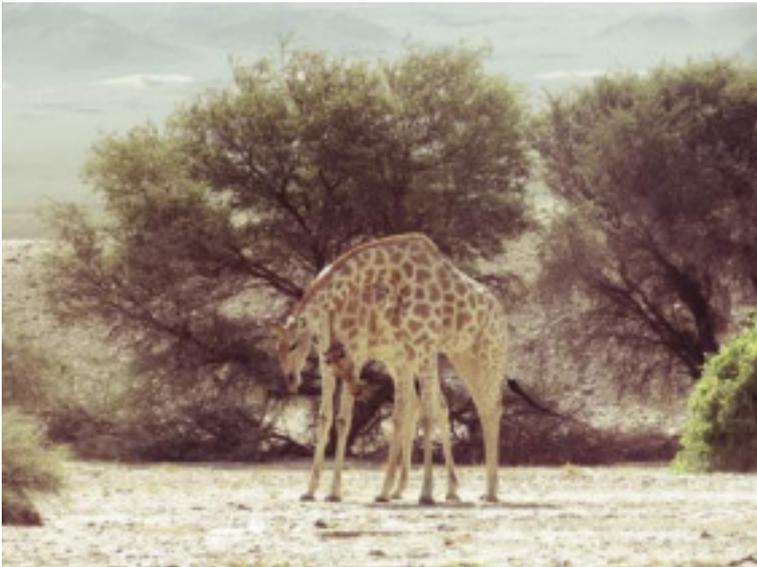
Winky Wonk too has continued to make his presence known in the Hoarusib River. Last month he offered us a clue as to how he ended up with his wonky ossicones in the first place. As mentioned in our last *Quarterly Update – October 2017* **Winky Wonk** was recently fitted with a satellite tracking device so we could follow his movements to learn more about where he goes and why he goes there. When we saw online that his tracker had stopped moving we were of course a little worried as **Winky Wonk** is not a sedentary fellow. Luckily, when we went to investigate we didn't find **Winky Wonk**, but rather his tracking unit lying in the sand! He had given us the slip! We can only assume that the unit was damaged and dropped off while **Winky Wonk** engaged in male-typical 'necking' behaviour (where male giraffe compete for dominance by swinging their necks before hitting each other with their necks and bony ossicones). It appears that **Winky Wonk** not only lost his tracking unit in an enthusiastic bout of necking, but also that sometime in the past he bent his own ossicones in the process! While losing such a tracking unit is a costly exercise for us (luckily, we retrieved the unit, but it is a costly exercise to fit these units to giraffe!), we are relieved to know that **Winky Wonk** is safe and sound. As the only organisation in the world using these new and innovative units, we know that this is the price we need to pay to pursue important giraffe conservation research and we are now even more confident than ever that these ossi-units do not impact the giraffe.



We also spotted **Dobby** in the Hoarusib River. Who knows, maybe he has even enjoyed the odd necking session with **Winky Wonk** as they compete over females! In his photo, you can see him standing together with another giraffe bull. This is a pattern that we observe rather often here in the North-West, where a few younger males spend time in the company of a larger older bull like **Dobby**. It seems likely that these young males seek out older role models from whom they can learn the tricks of the trade. In these bachelor herds, young male giraffe can often be spotted engaging in necking behaviours in a playful manner. Younger giraffe seem to practice between themselves, but the older males also join in the fun – although they are very careful with their juniors and only gently bump them with their necks and ossicones!



Unfortunately, we haven't managed to track down our other male, **Muffin**, who failed to make an appearance in the study area this season. However, every day we are learning more about this unique



population of giraffe and we now understand that they roam much further than we previously thought. Armed with this information we are very much looking forward to another field season and to getting out there to see what the giraffe are up to.

In the meantime, we are pleased to report that the population is looking as happy and healthy as ever and we look forward to sending you the next Quarterly Update soon.

Keen to find out more? You can keep up to date with GCF's activities on the GCF website (<https://giraffeconservation.org>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/giraffeconservationfoundation>).

Thanks again for your support.

You continue to make giraffe conservation in north-western Namibia and throughout Africa a reality!

