

# Northwest Namibia – Field Report



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Our first day was spent with GCF's environment education team in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve just out of Windhoek. This experience offered great insights into the Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) and the work that GCF does with local communities. The day involved a trek through the game reserve with a class of forty very excitable primary school children. They learnt how to track animal spoor and played various environmental games which will hopefully inspire the children to care for their environment and the wildlife in it. The entire session was very well organised and delivered. It was evident that the children gained so much from the experience, which was lovely to witness.

The following day our journey into the desert began ... with a bit of a bump. Quite literally, when a wheel came off the vehicle and rolled past us about 60km after leaving the last town *en route*! All is well that ends well and after a forced stop in Kamanjab to wait for spare parts we were on our way again a day later. Despite the blip we were all in good spirits and enjoyed a beer, some pool time and a culture trip to the local Himba village.



Back on the road again we continued our journey into the desert. Second time lucky! The journey didn't disappoint. We had many sightings along the way including giraffe, elephant, zebra, oryx, springbok and baboons, which were all complimented by the stunning landscape. After hours of travel we arrived at our first campsite. From this base, we surveyed the Hoanib River and surrounding areas for giraffe – and we found quite a few. Additionally, we had some rare sightings including two rhino and a puff adder which was basking in the sun in the middle of the road.



Amazing!

We also had an opportunity to visit the Hoanib Valley Camp, a Natural Selection lodge that GCF is in partnership with. We went there to pick up data sheets from the guides who help GCF with their long-term giraffe conservation research. What an amazing place! The giraffe theme runs throughout the lodge with information on giraffe conservation

and GCF's work, and guests have the opportunity to get involved in giraffe conservation research hands-on. What a great way to get people involved in giraffe conservation and spread the conservation message. Our camping experience was less luxurious as we camped without any facilities. On the plus side, we learnt how to make camp including putting up tents and making fires.



Our next stop was Okongwe, a man-made waterhole between river systems. Here we camped under the stars, which was an unforgettable experience. We spent two days surveying the area and incredibly we saw another rhino. What a great spot, Nat! While sitting by the campfire one night, we watched three jackals play – another great experience and a fantastic ending to another amazing day

From Okongwe, we travelled to Puros and camped at the beautiful community campsite. There were multiple highlights here including large herds of over 20 giraffe. Another highlight was when we arrived back at camp one evening and were greeted by three elephant including a small calf not far from our campsite. What an amazing experience~ We sat and watched them until they moved on.

We also encountered many giraffe – often not far from camp. Seeing a herd of 21 giraffe on the gravel plains just outside Puros was rather spectacular. The giraffe were busy doing 'giraffe stuff' and we observed behaviours like necking, mating and at one point almost all animals sat down. This was an incredible sighting and we spent at least 45 minutes observing this herd.

We also learnt a lot about sand whilst in Puros... more specifically how to dig our way out of it! All part of the experience! Lucky for some, the Manchester Bar had plenty of beer for us to stock up on. Another lovely way to end an eventful day.

Our last camping spot was not far from Elephant Song Campsite back in the Hoanib River. There had been numerous reports of giraffe in the area, but we had not spotted any. Spending more time in



the area proved successful and this time they didn't escape our surveys. Interestingly, most (if not all of the giraffe) were new, previously unidentified individuals.

In total we recorded 248 individual giraffe sightings in 43 different herds.

We broke camp the following morning for the last time and started our journey back to Windhoek. The journey back to



Windhoek was long and bumpy but we enjoyed a few tunes and a good old sing song. Time fly's when you're having fun!

Overall this whole experience has been incredible. Thank you for an amazing opportunity. Nat and Emma, thanks for making the trip so awesome and an experience we will never forget. We have taken so much back with us from this experience. Namibia is an amazingly beautiful place and GCF is incredible in what they do.

