

Northwest Namibia – Field Report

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Our adventure began in Windhoek where supplies were inventoried and routes were mapped. Early the next morning we embarked on our long trip north with sightings of baboons, ostriches, oryx, warthogs and even two giraffe! During this time, Emma taught us many interesting things about Namibia, the animals and people that reside there and answered any questions we had. We drove through Opuwo and continued west until we reached our first camp. The gentle sounds of a river and foraging cows carried us through our first night of wild camping. The following day we continued further west to the Marble Campsite. Despite not seeing any giraffe along the way and getting our truck stuck in the sand, morale remained high! The third day of our journey allowed us the first



opportunity to focus on the purpose of our trip. Surveying the dry riverbeds of the Ensengo and Nadas Rivers, we found the first three giraffe and began to familiarise ourselves with the duties we would carry out for the next few weeks. While the three of us kept our eyes peeled for giraffe, Kimberly focused on photographing the giraffe from specific angles to create a visual record, while Ashley recorded pertinent data like date, time, GPS location and herd size.

After spending two wonderful nights at Marble Camp with our canine companion ‘Marbo’ and bats fluttering around the showers, we set off for the Khumib River, another ephemeral or seasonal river. Heading south, we encountered some rocky roads that showcased Emma’s driving skills. With ten giraffe sightings in the Khumib River we were not disappointed; each day was getting better and better. We were able to hone our photography and data collecting skills as a team during this time. After a long day of surveying the Khumib River, we arrived at Puros Community Campsite where we were to begin surveying along the dry riverbed of the Hoarusib River the following days.

Day one in the Hoarusib River again did not disappoint. This riverbed was uniquely different from the Khumib River and seemed to house a variety of animals and people along the way. While the giraffe sightings were abundant, we were lucky enough to also spot a few elephant, steenbok and some beautiful birds. The following day we set out early to the Gomatum River, a tributary of the Hoarusib River, and were excited to spot a group of approximately 20 giraffe of all



ages first thing in the morning. This group put our skills to the test! In the afternoon we spent some time collecting giraffe DNA samples by remote dart – a new experience for us. However, evasive giraffe and high winds inhibited our success. The following morning, we packed up camp and set off on another new adventure.

With the ever-changing landscape, our drive to Okongwe provided some pristine views of Namibia’s mountains during the day and stellar views of the stars and milky way galaxy at night. While scouring the Okongwe region for two days, we spotted over 20 giraffe, many Hartmann’s mountain zebra herds and even a black rhino. Conditions were good for DNA collection, so we set our sights on a young female named “Ivy”. We had to learn that collecting DNA samples is not always that easy as the dart did not



drop immediately, and we followed her for quite a while. We decided to stop for lunch and catch up with her again later on. Of course, she dropped the dart while we ate our lunch, but luck was on our side and we managed to find the dart with a sample in it! We were thrilled that our efforts did not go to waste. Camping at Okongwe, the evenings were chilly with classic desert sunsets and the sounds of jackals. Though it seemed impossible, our next destination still topped the exceptional beauty of the landscape.

Heading further south the following morning, we reach the dry riverbed of the Hoanib River where we set up camp behind a huge rocky hill that felt all our own. Once again, this river was entirely different than the ones that preceded it. With towering mountains along each side and enormous Ana trees along the way, it was a new and wonderful landscape Namibia had not yet offered to us. Spending three nights here allowed us to survey the Hoanib River all the way into the Skeleton Coast National Park, where we spotted at least 15 giraffe along the way. The riverbed continued to narrow the further west we travelled, cautiously turning each corner. Evidence of giraffe was found this far



east but none were seen. On the return trip, we spotted two notable giraffe, Windy and Coffee Girl – both of them part of GCF’s Adopt-a-Giraffe programme. Windy is one of the oldest recorded giraffe in the survey area and Coffee Girl was attacked by lion a while back and is missing part of her tail. During our time camping by the Hoanib River, we also visited Natural Selection’s stunning Hoanib Valley Camp where we learned more about Namibia’s wildlife from local guides. It was inspiring to hear





some of their stories and ambitions about conservation efforts in their communities. During our last day in the Hoanib River, we saw a few more giraffe before heading east towards Kamanjab.

Kamanjab was the last stop before heading back to Windhoek and we took the opportunity to learn about the indigenous Himba people and enjoy a hot shower. The long drive back to Windhoek was once again abundant in warthog, baboon, and various ungulate species sightings. On the last day of our trip we spent time in the

stunning new GCF office identifying giraffe and also exploring a local craft market.

With Lion Country Safari as our platform we hope to influence and incorporate new conservation programmes relating to all the information we gathered during the trip. Meeting the staff at GCF and hearing about the school field trips along with the impressive workbooks gave us much inspiration to do something similar back home. Having the opportunity to speak with a couple of local guides at the lodge was both informative and rewarding. Understanding how they feel about conservation and protecting wildlife has helped us realise how connected we are. We hope to use everything we have learned and start a more hands-on approach to conservation. Through tours, school trips, special events, day camps and AAZK we can try to inform and educate people back home about giraffe conservation.

“Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall they be saved.” –Dr. Jane Goodall

We thank you very much for allowing us this incredible opportunity to experience the impressive giraffe conservation work undertaken by GCF.

