
WILDLIFE CAPTURE EXPERIENCE, NAMIBIA

**A PRICELESS EXPOSURE VISIT FOR UGANDA WILDLIFE AUTHORITY
TRANSLOCATION TEAM TO NAMIBIA 23 JUNE-5 JULY, 2019**



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Introduction

Since 2013, the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) have worked together to enhance wildlife capture services in Uganda through direct hands-on training of the frontline UWA staff. These engagements have yielded notable results such as 100+ successful wildlife rescues and enhanced capacity in translocation. To provide additional training to the UWA capture team, GCF offered the opportunity for hands-on training and the opportunity to work with experienced capture teams in another country. Namibia was a suitable choice because of its long capture season in winter which provides enormous opportunity to capture a wide range of species using a variety of methods. An invitation was extended to six UWA staff by the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) to participate in the 2019 wildlife capture season.

Following the invitation, the team of six UWA staff namely: Dr. Robert Aruho (Senior Veterinary Officer, UWA Headquarters), Nicholas Nuwajuka (Private Ranger, QECA), Tom Mawa (Private Range, East Madi Wildlife Reserve, MFCA), Rogers Mboowa (Driver, MECA), Betty Nakubulwa (Private Ranger, based at UWEC), Allan Bagonza (Private Ranger, Katonga Wildlife Reserve, KCA), travelled to Namibia from 23rd June to 5th July, 2019 to participate in wildlife capture and translocation.

The exposure trip was fully funded by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, while the Columbus Zoo AAZK Chapter provided additional support to purchase some camping equipment and protective gear for the team.

In Namibia, the team worked with both government and private game capture teams. By the end of the visit, the team had participated in the mass capture of six giraffe and 95 oryx as well as loading of 20 ostrich and ten eland for transport. The team also participated in the collaring of zebra and wildebeest in Etosha National Park together with a group of veterinarians and students from the University of Namibia and the University of South Africa.

In addition, the team was given an invaluable opportunity to participate in a field day of GCF's Khomas Environmental Education Programme at Daan Viljoen Wildlife Reserve, visited the Cheetah Conservation Fund and spent two nights at Okonjima Nature Reserve, the home of the Africat Foundation. Overall, this visit accorded the UWA team a vast experience which will be pivotal in improving the UWA wildlife capture services.

1. Mass Capture of Oryx with Du Preez Wild

These activities were organised through Du Preez Wildlife based in Otjiwarongo, Namibia. The team captured 95 oryx and also participated in the loading of eland and ostrich which were scheduled for transportation to Angola.

Preparations for capture of oryx

Equipment: Bell Helicopter, 3 Landcruiser pickups, 2 specialized game capture trucks, plastic sheets/curtains, electric prodders, boma poles, pole syringe, hard boards, wire strainer, stainless steel wire cable (5mm), plastic pipes for capping horns.

Drugs: tranquilizers, tick spray.



Figure 1: A light bell helicopter is a vital piece of equipment for mass capture of wildlife.

Construction of the boma

The team participated in the construction of a V-shaped coral boma with 3-metre-high plastic sheeting walls that were constructed by hanging the sheeting over strong poles with a strong tensed stainless-steel cable. A crash and the loading ramp were constructed at the end of the boma and a loading truck fitted with a crate was properly positioned at the ramp allowing the doors of the transport crate to form a continuous corridor with the entrance into the boma. The boma was partitioned into three compartments by plastic sheets/curtains on stainless-steel cables.

Capture of the animals

After finding a suitable group of animals from the air, the helicopter was used to herd the group of oryx into the boma at high speed. Each curtain was closed immediately after the animals ran past on the sound of the helicopter's siren. This action pushed the animals forward towards the next curtain until they reached the loading ramp. At the loading ramp, for all antelopes, plastic pipes were used to cover the horns to prevent injury to the team and also to other animals. The animals were then pushed into the truck and each compartment was filled with seven oryx before the dividers were closed and the truck was closed and moved off the ramp.

Tranquilization and treatments

After loading, each animal was injected with long-acting antibiotic (Betamox[®], Norbrook Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Ireland) and a short acting tranquilizer (azaperone tartrate) using a hand-held pole syringe from the roof of the truck. Finally, all animals were sprayed with a pyrethroid pour-on insecticide to control kill external parasites.

Once all the treatments were completed, the animals were transported from the capture sites to the holding boma at Du Preez Wild Headquarters in Otjiwarongo, to await health certification and transportation to their final destination.

2. Mass capture of giraffe in Etosha National Park with MET

After working with Du Preez Wild, the team travelled further north to Etosha National Park (NP) to participate in the mass capture of giraffe. This capture was organized by the MET Game Capture Unit and aimed at capturing six subadult giraffe (two males, four females) for introduction to a communal conservancy north of Etosha NP.

Equipment and materials

5- seater airbus helicopter, 2 game transport trucks, plastic sheets/curtains, 4 pick up land cruisers, wire strainers, 4mm steel cables, giraffe transport crate, 500-litre water bowser, 4 metre poles for building the boma and camping gear.

Boma construction

A V-shaped boma was constructed in the eastern section of the park where large herds of giraffe were sighted. The boma was partitioned with three curtains and at the narrow end a loading ramp with crush were erected. The loading crate was attached to the ramp to ensure a continuous passage from the crate to the boma.

The capture

Giraffe were located and driven into the boma using the helicopter. As soon as the giraffe ran past each compartment, the curtains were closed compelling the animals to run further ahead up to the loading area. Unfortunately, in the loading compartment, the giraffe did not enter the crate as the crossbar at the entrance of the crush was too low. Efforts to push the giraffe with human barriers did not succeed and the team eventually decided to release the giraffe.



Figure 2: Giraffe in the boma awaiting loading.

3. Zebra and Blue Wildebeest capture in Etosha National Park

The team spent a day with Dr. Mark Jago from the University of Namibia assisting in collaring zebra and wildebeest for research. Zebra and blue wildebeest were captured and fitted with satellite collars as well as a sub-cutaneous temperature logger to learn about changes in body temperature related to ambient temperature and stress as part of a collaborative research project with the University of South Africa.



Figure 3: The team working with Dr. Mark Jago to collar a zebra.

4. Visit to Cheetah Conservation Fund

The team visited the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) east of Ojiwarongo. The aim of the visit was to learn about rehabilitation of rescued animals and the community conservation approaches used by CCF. The team had a guided tour of the CCF facility, saw some rehabilitated cheetah in enclosures and learned about livestock guard dogs. The team also visited CCF's education hall that explained different aspects of cheetah conservation.

5. Visit to Okonjima Nature Reserve, the home of the Africat Foundation

The team spent two nights at the environmental education centre at Okonjima Nature Reserve. Through this visit, the team gained some understanding the critical role that research plays in conservation. This reserve is at the forefront of research in wild cats (lions, cheetahs, leopards), and pangolin. Researchers at the reserve showcased their work through presentations and also provided the UWA team a field experience where they tracked leopard and pangolins as well as a tour through their facility. The GCF team used the opportunity to give a presentation on giraffe conservation and their work to the guides and other staff at Okonjima and Africat.

6. The Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) Experience

GCF recognizes that for the conservation efforts to be sustained, involvement of the young people who make up almost 70% of the sub Sahara human population is very key. This has prompted them to establish the Khomas Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) in Namibia and support Giraffe Research and Education (GEAR) in Uganda. These programs involve bringing primary and high school students to a national park in the respective country and learn about wildlife, environment, sustainable development and much more. In Namibia, the UWA team had the opportunity to join a group of primary school students on their trip to Daan Viljoen Wildlife Reserve. During these excursions, a dedicated GCF environmental education team passes on vital conservation education messages to these young people. During our interaction with the kids, it was clear they really enjoy these experiences. Together, we tracked giraffe on foot, and learnt about wildlife habitats and animal tracking signs using footprints, faecal deposits and feeding habits. Overall this was a very rewarding experience.



Figure 4: UWA team with Namibian students during the KEEP field day.

Lessons learnt

- Wildlife capture requires constant training and ideally maintenance of same teams to ensure high quality performance. Our time in Namibia has shown the importance of a team that works together well, where everybody knows their tasks and responsibilities. The more time people spend together as a team and doing their job, the better the outcome.
- For any wildlife capture team to be successful four things must be in place:

- ❖ Correct and well-maintained equipment;
- ❖ A technical leader who takes full responsibility of capture;
- ❖ An administration leader who handles the communication and oversees the exercise to allow the technical team to concentrate on the capture; and
- ❖ Full commitment of the entire capture team.



Figure 5: UWA team with GCF educators during field day at Daan Viljoen Wildlife Reserve

Recommendations

- UWA with support from GCF has invested a great deal in establishment of a wildlife capture unit and the results of this investment are evident. However, to professionalize the UWA capture team further, it is important to also invest into the right equipment.
- It would be beneficial to have access to a helicopter to aid wildlife capture operations especially for big game darting and mass capture.
- It would be beneficial to purchase a specialized game truck and transport crates.
- From our experience in Namibia, we have learned that all capture operations require careful planning. This is particularly true for mass capture and the location and structure of the boma is of high importance. In the case of giraffe, if the team is not ready for mass capture, it is preferable to capture animals individually to avoid unnecessary stress for the animals and risk for staff.

Appreciation

We extend our appreciation to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), Namibia for extending an invitation and allowing the UWA team to participate in capture of wildlife in Namibia's premier Etosha National Park without any restriction. A special thanks goes to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) who organised and funded the entire exposure trip of our team of six. Furthermore, we would like to thank the GCF staff who made us feel welcome in Namibia and accompanied us to the field during our entire stay. We extend our sincere appreciation to Columbus Zoo and Aquaria AAZK who provided funding for camping equipment and field gear for our team. Special thanks goes to Du Preez Wild, Namibia who allowed us to participate in the game capture and generously shared their knowledge and experience with our team. Thanks also goes to Okonjima Nature Reserve, Africat Foundation and Cheetah Conservation Fund, for welcoming us into their facilities. Finally, it is befitting again to extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Julian and Stephanie Fennessy, and their children Molly and Luca, for their valuable support, generosity and time, and most of all for ensuring our comfort during our stay. With you, we felt really at home every second of our stay!