



## Operation Twiga II

### Saving Uganda's threatened Nubian giraffe

*August 2017*

In a daring mission, the Uganda Wildlife Authority with the support of GCF and other partners set about boosting the recently established Nubian giraffe population in the southern part of Murchison Falls National Park. In August an additional 19 giraffe were translocated from the northern to the southern side of the Park.

Operation Twiga II (*twiga* is Swahili for *giraffe*) required a lot of planning and commitment to make it a reality. After 18 Nubian giraffe crossed the Nile River in Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda in early 2016, this important satellite population was now boosted with more individuals to help it thrive and become a healthy and sustainable population. Coordinated by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the translocation was supported by GCF working with local partners Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) and Makerere University, as well as an array of international zoo partners, and importantly funded by the Metzger Foundation.



Over the course of three weeks, the UWA capture team together with many supporters spent long hours in the field, individually capturing and translocating the giraffe. After a short stay in the *boma* (enclosure) on the northern side of the Park, the giraffe crossed the Nile River on a ferry in small groups travelling in style on the back of the translocation truck that was donated by GCF in 2016 through funding raised on World Giraffe Day 2015.

With only an estimated 2,645 individuals remaining in the wild, Nubian giraffe are in peril. Nubian giraffe are a subspecies of the northern giraffe, which in turn is one of the least numerous giraffe species with less than 5,200 individuals remaining. It is time to act now to protect these iconic animals before it is too late!



UWA is at the forefront of giraffe conservation in Africa. Supported by GCF, the development of Uganda’s first National Giraffe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan is well on its way – one of the first in Africa. Almost 50% of the wild Nubian giraffe population live in Murchison Falls National Park. With pending oil exploration in the core giraffe range, it is important to ensure a secure future for these highly threatened giraffe. As noted by Dr. Patrick Atimnedi, UWA’s Manager of Veterinary Services: “The range of development projects in the northern sector has the potential to impact negatively on the giraffe stock. As this Park is separated by the Nile, and giraffe, unlike other animals like elephant, cannot swim across the river, they are concentrated in the northern sector; that is why we have to help them cross that natural barrier”.

Mirroring Operation Twiga I, GCF brought along a secret weapon: legendary wildlife veterinarian Dr Pete Morkel, who supported the Ugandan veterinary team, lending a helping hand when required and generously sharing his wealth of knowledge. The operation saw again a steep learning curve by all as the UWA team further increased their giraffe capture skills – no single giraffe capture is ever the same. These achievements were applauded by numerous high level visitors who joined the mission for brief visits including UWA Executive Director Dr Andrew Seguya, who encouraged the team during his visit to the Park and flagged off the mission together with Lewis Metzger of the Metzger Foundation.

The Ugandan team was further supported by giraffe partners from the USA, who were more than happy to join into the translocation exercise and provided valuable medical supplies and support for the translocation and beyond. Importantly, the team also gathered valuable data to improve giraffe husbandry in captivity as part of a collaboration through the AZA SAFE programme. During Operation Twiga II the first ever X-rays of giraffe feet were taken in the wild by Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. These X-rays together with hoof prints, data and photos that were also taken from each individual giraffe will



help to improve hoof care in zoos around the world and might help to find ways to prevent early-onset arthritis in zoo giraffe. Blood work monitoring during the capture helped to monitor individual giraffe health while at the same time providing a baseline and comparison for zoo giraffe. We thank the following AZA partners for their support: Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Colorado State University, Columbus Zoo and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, ELPO and Living Desert.



Four of the translocated giraffe were fitted with new GPS satellite solar units that will help monitor their movements in their new home and give us a better understanding of habitat use. During Operation Twiga II, the team spotted a few of the previously translocated giraffe on the southern side including Melvin, the involuntary star of the BBC/PBS documentary 'Giraffes: Africa's Gentle Giants' who seems to be thriving in his new home.



What an amazing giraffe conservation effort by UWA and its team, in particular Drs Robert Aruho, Eric Enyel and Patrick Atimnedi. As GCF, we were proud to partner with so many others to boost the distribution of Nubian giraffe and hopefully to help grow their population. “Giraffe conservation is a team effort, and we at GCF are proud to have brought so many stakeholders together for the long-term conservation of this iconic animal – we are confident that together we can continue to make a difference for giraffe in Africa” said GCF Directors Dr Julian and Steph Fennessy.



Images by Andrea Bryant, Michael Butler Bown and Sean Viljoen.

