

Project Update: August 2022

Over the past 3 months there have been a number of activities and field work conducted in Hwange National Park (HNP) to help us better understand giraffe genetics, ecology and the current threats that they are facing in Zimbabwe. We recently completed another research trip to Hwange National Park and a detailed breakdown can be found below:

GPS Tagging Operation

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authorities (ZimParks), recently fitted 14 solar-powered GPS satellite units to giraffe in HNP (See photos below). This operation was the first of its kind in HNP and will help us better understand giraffe movements inside and outside of protected areas. It will also give us valuable information on giraffe habitat requirements and social structures throughout this landscape, which in turn, will be compared to other population across Zimbabwe and Africa. Ultimately, these results will feed into the development of the first ever National Strategy Plan for giraffe conservation in Zimbabwe and fits in with the goals and objectives as set out in the draft giraffe conservation strategy plan for the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA).

This operation presented us with a great opportunity to increase our capacity building in Zimbabwe, educating locals and ZimParks representatives on best practice giraffe capturing techniques.

Field Research



Another season (early dry) of field research was done across our two main areas within HNP, namely, Main Camp and Ngamo Plains areas. These two areas differ substantially with regards to habitat types and different management strategies. We continued our data collection with a strong focus on giraffe population dynamics, dietary preference and browse availability and activity budgets.

Giraffe populations in HNP are still facing a variety of threats e.g., habitat fragmentation, illegal poaching and encroachment from human settlements (See photo of giraffe crossing the commercial railway running through HNP). This is a cause for concern and further conservation initiatives are needed to better manage giraffe populations in the future. With sound conservation initiatives and better strategies, we will continue to do the work on the ground in order to secure a future for giraffe in Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa.



Collaborations and Partnerships

We continue to work closely with local government (ZimParks) to further develop this project and increase awareness of giraffe conservation in Zimbabwe and specifically HNP. There have been further involvements from locals and other organisations in HNP to strengthen our relationships with communities in the surrounding areas (See photo below).

Future Plans

Field work will continue during September/October 2022 in HNP, where after, I will start with the analysis of the data and the write up of my PhD thesis. We will continue to produce seasonal reports for ZimParks on the home ranges/movements of the giraffe in HNP. Giraffe genetic samples are being shipped to Bik-F Senckenberg in Germany where they will be analysed and give us better information on the genetic structure of all major giraffe populations across Zimbabwe – this will great conservation benefits as a study of this kind have never been done before.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to The Rufford Foundation for giving us the support needed to conduct this research in Zimbabwe. We are grateful to Giraffe Conservation Foundation for its continuous support and efforts towards the project. We thank ZimParks for their support of, and permission, to conduct our research in Zimbabwe. We also thank Stellenbosch University for the support and technical assistance.



