

20 June 2023

Reintroduction of Giraffes in the North West Conservancies Stradling the Escarpment.

11/12 June 2023

General Background

Namibia has demonstrated a commitment to conservation from its foundation. After attaining its independence in 1990, from South Africa's then-apartheid government, the new country embedded a focus on natural resources, healthy ecosystems, and biodiversity for the benefit of both people and wildlife directly into its constitution. Over the past 32 years, the Namibian government has reaffirmed this commitment, supporting a well-managed network of 20 protected areas, one of the world's most successful community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) programmes, and some internationally recognised private nature reserves. Today, more than 44% of Namibia is under conservation management. Along the country's western border, the world's oldest desert, the Namib, follows the coast for nearly 2,000 km (about 1,200 mi) reaching north into Angola and south into South Africa. Living up to its name, which means "vast place," the Namib stretches eastward from the coast for 130-160 km (80-100 mi), gradually ascending until it reaches the Great Escarpment, the edge of the plateau that separates the region's highland interior from the coastal zone. Running along the eastern edge of the Namib, between the arid desert and the higher-rainfall escarpment area, the pro-Namib ecozone features plants and wildlife specially adapted to this semiarid region—and holds the promise of exciting conservation opportunities. With 50 mm (nearly two inches) more rain per year on average compared to the Namib (which gets less than an inch each year), grasses, trees, shrubs, and other vegetation are able to take root, providing a critical food source for wildlife migrating east from the drier desert areas during the sporadic rains (December to April). Conserving this pro-Namib landscape will protect large-scale grasslands which are critical to maintaining seasonal migratory pathways, protecting biodiversity, and sustaining wildlife, including endangered species like giraffe and rhino.

Grasslands are also a significant carbon store – which could be lost by misplaced cattle, sheep and goat farming which strips the land bare.

The Ongongo and Otjiu-West conservancies had since gazettelement requested for the reintroduction of giraffes in the landscape because historically giraffes used to roam this area. Due to illegal hunting and movement of people these majestic creatures were decimated and today there is no trace of them in the immediate area. Hence immediately after gazettelement in 2012 they approached IRDNC asking for the return of giraffes to their land. Through the years these communities have demonstrated a strong commitment to protect the existing wildlife which includes Springbok, Kudu, Mountain Zebra, and Oryx. Moreover, they have shown a commitment to protect elephants that have dispersed up the Hoarusib River into the landscape of adjoining conservancies- despite some elephant - human conflict challenges. Their commitment to conserving wildlife kept them hopeful that one day they would be able to see giraffe roam their landscape again. This long coming dream was made a reality with support from the Namibia Chamber of Environment (NCE), Etosha Heights, Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) and IRDNC.

Capture and Release of Giraffes

After a pre-reintroduction study funded by NCE found that the area is indeed suitable for giraffes to thrive again, IRDNC went on a resource mobilisation exercise to make this milestone a reality. In no time the following institutions agreed to support the initiative:

Etosha Height Private Nature Reserve – Donated a breeding herd of 4 giraffes

NCE – Funded the study and also the fuel needed to move the MEFT truck

NUST – Expertise from the biodiversity institute

MEFT – Game capture equipment and personnel

GCF – Giraffe capturing Expertise, Wildlife Veterinarian on site and helicopter services

IRDNC – Coordination, resource mobilisation and community liaison

On the 11th of June, while the African Wildlife vet training was underway, the above-mentioned institutions joint forces and made the translocation of four giraffes to Ongongo and Otjiu West conservancies a reality. The capture was led by the GCF vet Dr. Sarah Ferguson and alongside her a number of training vets and supporting crew from various institutions.

Once again this exercise demonstrated the true unity and compatibility of each role player in Namibia's conservation fraternity. Without this collaboration it would have been impossible to make the dream of these committed conservancies come true. Gratitude pours out to all involved and we can only ask for this unity to sustain for years to come.

Gallery – Photos



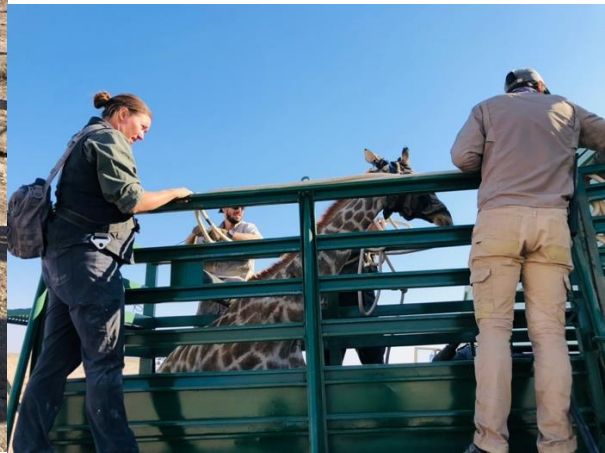
Sign board of the land from where the Giraffes were captured



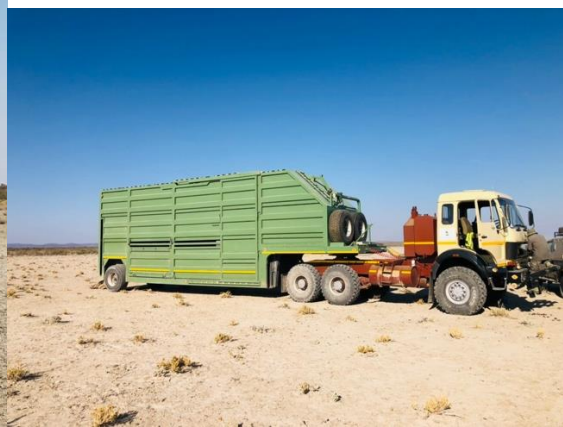
Darting from the Air by Sarah Ferguson



Handling of Giraffe after darting – administration of antidote, taking record of vitals and other essential measurements and blindfolding for herding into the chariot and eventually into the truck.



Herding into chriot



Helicopter and Truck Used during the capture and transportation of the giraffes



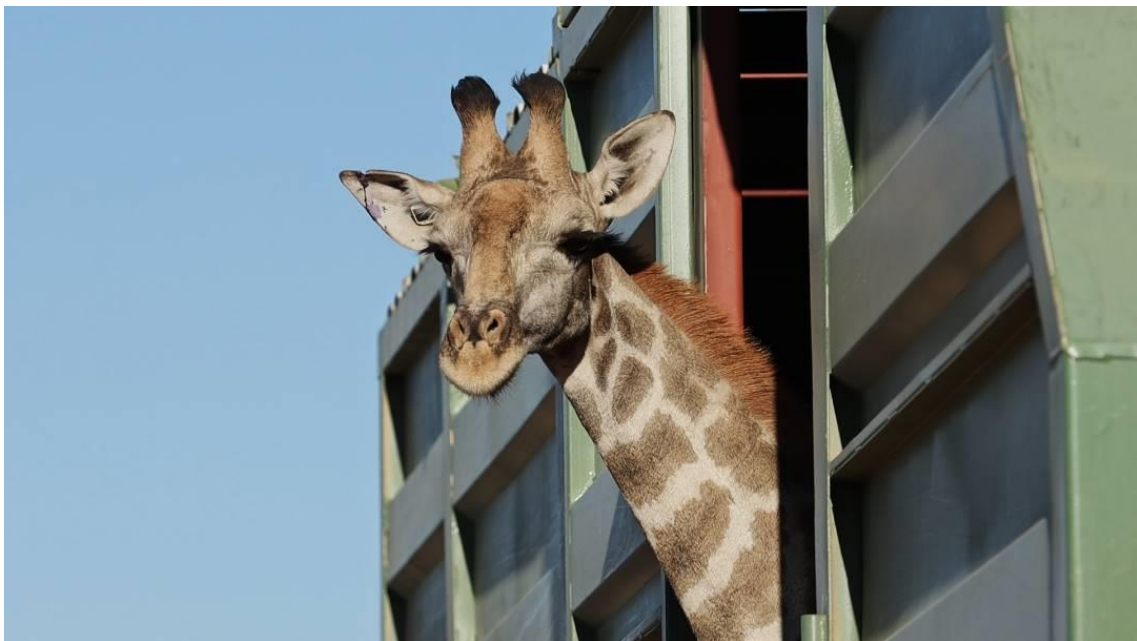
Arrival at the border of Ongongo and Otjiu West Conservancy where the entire village was curious to see these animals step hoof in their conservancy



Young stars of the conservancy curious to see what is making the clicking and knocking sound in inside the trailer of the truck. They had camped there all night just to wait for the release hour.



Ongongo chairlady giving gratitude to IRDNC and expressing her joy of this mementoes event. They had camped near the release site waiting for the truck to arrive.



One of the four giraffes sticking out its neck to assess the new environment before getting of the truck



The four Giraffes jumping off the truck into their new home with style



Quick smell of the vegetation for suitability



MEFT staff treated to a pot of fresh goat meat to ensure that they have enough energy before moving the truck to the actual release site.

A mere thank you will not suffice to express the feeling and the gratitude expressed by this community.

The four giraffes are equipped with ceres tags and are being monitored on earth ranger by GCF and IRDNC. The conservancy game guards will be equipped with ID cards (unique patterns) of each giraffe and they would be able to id them every time they encounter them in the field.