

Caught on tape: camera trapping giraffe in Etosha National Park, Namibia

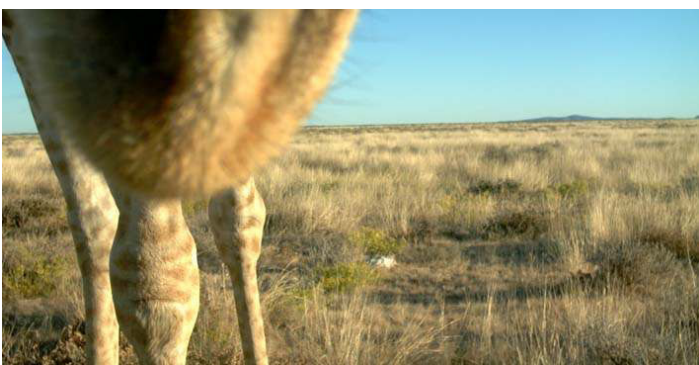
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The camera traps don't look like much from the tourist roads around Okaukeujo Rest Camp, one of the main tourist camps in Namibia's famous Etosha National Park. But these small boxes should not be underestimated; they are continuously recording a host of information about all kinds of species in their natural habitat.

The cameras were originally set up in 2010 by Dr. Wendy Turner (University of California, Berkeley) to study anthrax transmission at carcass sites. Four camera sites quickly grew to eight and hundreds of thousands of pictures poured in.



These included over seven thousand pictures of giraffe (*Giraffe camelopardalis angolensis*) spanning two years that provide a unique prospective on giraffe in the park. Through my work with the Namibia Nature Foundation and Giraffe Conservation Foundation I was lucky enough to be able to analyse these pictures over the last few months.



It is just after sunrise and a giraffe is walking across a grassy plane towards the camera. The picture fills with a nose, then part of a leg and goes completely brown. I continue to flip through the images, watching as the giraffe saunters away leaving the camera angle slightly askew. I exhale in relief; it would not have been the first time a giraffe mercilessly knocked over a camera for a good scratch.

As tedious as sitting in the office and sorting through pictures could be, I was always amazed by the curiosity of these tall creatures.

Fortunately there were not just pictures of noses and legs, but also pictures of giraffe doing exactly what giraffe do: eating, walking, mating, suckling, chewing bones (osteophagia), etc.



The camera traps recorded these behaviours 24/7 in different locations, an impossible feat for a researcher in a car. As a result, the most interesting data has been of daily and seasonal movement patterns. During a 24-hour day, giraffe travelled the most around sunrise and sunset.



Giraffe were active throughout the night too, especially in the hours following sunset. Using the number of photos at specific sites we could see which areas they preferred during the wet and dry seasons. This information is being used to better understand giraffe behaviour in Etosha National Park.

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