

PRESS RELEASE

Critically Endangered Giraffe Sub Species to be Satellite Collared as part of Leading-Edge Conservation Effort

Next week history will be made in Niger, West Africa when eight of the highly endangered West African Giraffe that roam there will be fitted with the very latest specifically-designed GPS satellite collars. The collars will enable resident research scientist Jean-Patrick Suraud (ASGN*) and his team to monitor and study more closely the range over which these amazing animals roam. Specific data can be downloaded every hour from the collars, if necessary, in order to track all movements and, over time this will give the research team a better understanding of habitat need, enabling them to put measures in place to avoid human conflict. Already part of a highly successful conservation effort, the West African Giraffe was teetering on the edge of extinction in the late 1990s with numbers having dwindled to a mere 50 animals. Today with 200 giraffe in existence it is crucial that every effort is made to understand exactly what the impact of a slowly increasing population will mean in the context of land management and human co-existence.

Although protected by law, the giraffe are not protected within a reserve area, they are free to roam at will and conservation efforts to date have meant working very closely with and supporting the local communities who now see the giraffe as a positive asset in their world.

Dr Julian Fennessy, founding trustee of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), (Ed 1) pioneered the use of the satellite collar with Giraffe in Namibia in September 2002. He comments “The opportunity to work with one the world’s most endangered mega-fauna is rare in this day and age, and hopefully these efforts will help unravel the mysteries of these giraffe as they increase their range and compete with humans to eke out their existence.” GPS Satellite collaring is more commonly used with elephant to establish range and movement and has given very valuable data to help scientists recommend conservation measures including minimising human conflict.

Capturing the animals and applying the collars however is a highly skilled operation particularly with giraffe who unlike elephant cannot be under the influence of the anaesthetic drug for longer than a matter of minutes, timing is critical therefore and as soon as the drug starts to take effect, the animal has to be carefully brought down by means of a rope team and the antidote administered immediately. The collaring itself and biological measurements and samples are all taken once the animal is fully conscious (Editors Note 2) “GPS satellite collaring giraffe is an adrenalin-filled exercise to put it mildly but we learnt a great deal with our successful efforts in Namibia and we have the best team working together again for this important effort in Niger,” comments Andy Tutchings, co-founder and trustee of GCF.

Dr H O Reuter from African Wildlife Services (<http://www.wildlife.com.na/>) formerly from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in Namibia is the only vet to have undertaken GPS Satellite collaring of giraffe and will be a key member of the team in Niger next week.

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation is providing part funding for this exercise to cover some GPS satellite collars, technical co-ordination of the ground capture , vet costs and the expertise of Dr Julian Fennessy and Andy Tutchings . The Niger government are fully supporting the exercise and the primary funding for the collars themselves is being provided by FFEM (<http://www.ffem.fr/jahia/Jahia>).

More details at: www.giraffeconservation.org

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Editors Notes:

1. Dr Julian Fennessy is also founder and Chairman of the IUCN/SSC ASG International Giraffe Working Group and has been Technical Adviser to the Niger giraffe research and conservation efforts since 2005.
2. Once a giraffe has been administered the antidote drug, it is very important to keep the animal calm, this means muffling the ears, putting a hood over the animal's head and employing a certain amount of muscle power to keep it in place while all the critical work is completed.
3. * ASGN - (Association pour la Sauvegarde des Girafes du Niger - Association for Saving the Giraffes of Niger)

For more information, facts and figures please see our website and follow the links to the Niger Project area, you will also see a daily blog as the satellite collaring takes place.