

Project update: January 2019

I just wanted to let you know things are going very well here in Chad, and the camera traps Rufford were kind enough to fund are proving to be an amazing addition to the project!

Just after Christmas we had the sad news that a baby giraffe had been killed overnight and the mother was still at the site. So we were able to put up two camera traps to monitor the mother's behaviour at the carcass site for the first week, and capture the scavenging behaviour of the lions here. It's been really interesting and a very active feed on the projects Facebook page!

Here's the whole story on that for you:

The baby was 1-2 weeks old as its ossicones, which are fleshy and flattened to the skull at the time of birth, and as the giraffe gets older they slowly spring up, calcify and fuse to the skull, were still at an angle. Also the umbilical cord was still attached and the baby was small.



The cause of death looks to be a leopard attack to the jugular, as there were puncture marks to both sides of the neck indicative of leopard. We assume the mother managed to fight off the leopard and was stood protecting the dead calf when we arrived on the scene we suspect within 12 hours of the attack.

We worked quickly to gather photo id shots of the baby and mother who was stood nearby, to see if they were in our database – they were not – we determined cause

of death and took some measurements and photos, before setting up a camera trap and leaving the mother to return to her calf.

We left so the mother giraffe could continue her natural behaviour without our presence; it has been documented that mothers will stand guard with their young for 3 nights or more, and regularly returning to the spot after many weeks.

We returned three days later to watch the camera trap footage, which is what we now share with you...



The mother stood constant guard of her baby from the Friday night it was killed until about 5:40pm the following day (by which time in Chad it is nightfall), she bravely stood vigil even when the lions were close by watching, and one of the photo and following video sequence shows her chasing a lion off the calf, before she had to leave.

There were two lions on the camera trap who spent 10 hours straight eating the carcass, and within 40 minutes of them leaving the mother returned at first light.



We are still monitoring the site, with two camera traps now, one on the original site where the mother is still returning to and a partial skull and two jaw bones remain, and one about 35 m away where I found the remains of all four legs, still intact, some vertebrae and ribs. We will continue to monitor the site for scavenging behaviour and the mother's behaviour.



Although this is an aspect of giraffe ecology I wanted to monitor throughout my time at Zakouma NP, this was particularly upsetting to see how distressed the mother was,

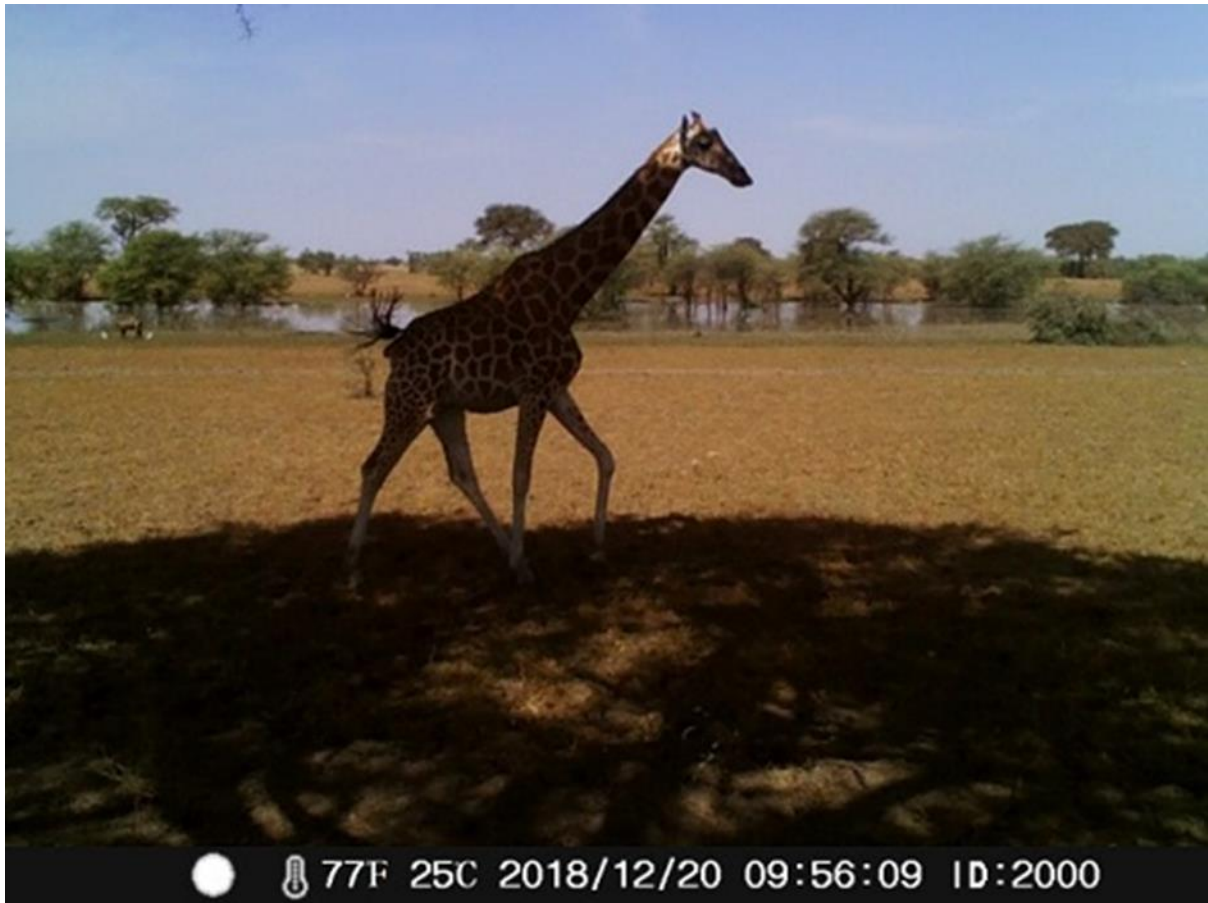
and she clearly was a very fierce and capable, loving mother; I have no doubt she will go on to rear many healthy young, this is just a natural occurrence in wildlife, and it's important, as this baby's death meant the lions got a feed, and I'm sure when we check there will be hyenas, vultures and all sorts of insects who benefit from the carcass too. Cue circle of life music!

FYI giraffe mothers get a bad rap for not being the most attentive, but I think this one shows that's not the case – remember the mother giraffe is pregnant for 15 months! She then spends a further 6 months weaning the young, although she will let it drink from her until her next calf is born, which she is likely already pregnant with, and the older calf will stay with the mother for up to 4 years.

I have also gathered a lot of other giraffe footage and photos using the camera traps at strategic positions throughout Zakouma NP and have been able to get ID photos from screen grabs too, so a really important aspect of the project is being helped with the cameras!



Bending to eat minerals from the soil in Tinga area of Zakouma.



Shot taken in Fatagoki area of Zakouma.

NOTES:

- We are also generating a lot of social media interest by putting up general wildlife encounters and mentioning Rufford as we do so.
- We also managed to fit eight female giraffe with GPS units this past week with the help of Pete Morkel the vet who just won the Prince William award for Conservation in Africa as well as Giraffe Conservation Foundation's Dr Julian Fennessy, along with African Parks Zakouma manager Leon Lamprecht and other Zakouma workers.