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NUST BRIEF

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Newly fitted GPS monitors keep giraffes' tails wagging

...as researchers and students collect data to protect this iconic species

Four new satellite GPS telemetry were fitted on giraffes in Etosha National Park and Ehirovipuka Communal Conservancy recently. This was done by NUST's Biodiversity Research Centre (BRC), in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism; the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF); and the University of Namibia's School of Veterinary Medicine.

The exercise was done under the auspices of the ORYCS project, a Namibian-German research project, in collaboration with Potsdam University, Germany. "Namibia is one of the few places where giraffes are adequately protected and their numbers are growing. Therefore, understanding their movements, what they eat, and how they react to human encroachment can be used for their global protection," said Prof Morgan Hauptfleisch, the BRC Head and Associate Professor, from NUST's Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences

Due to their unique physical structure, it is not a simple task to fit GPS monitors on giraffes. The GCF was the first to use GPS satellite units and have been evolving them for the last 20 years. "In July, NUST and GCF tested a new device that can be attached to the tail of the giraffe. This could replace the previous technology which is fitted to the horn of the animal," Prof Hauptfleisch explained.

In the past, research showed that ossicone (horn) GPS devices got damaged on a regular basis when giraffes fight, and in general, the process to fit the device was a lengthy one. "The tail units take a minute, at most, to fit, and since this specie does not respond well to anaesthetics, we need to get the animal back on its feet as quickly as possible," Prof Hauptfleisch elaborated.

The device provides information on the feeding requirements and preferences of animals, and identifies obstacles tomigration and possible sites of human-wildlife conflict. "After two weeks of observation, I am pleased to note that tail trackers are performing well," remarked Jackson Hamutenya, a Researcher from GCF.

Prof Morgan Hauptfleisch (right, crouching) fitting a tail unit with experts from GFC and NUST graduates.

Photo: Beryl Wilson

To find out about the programmes offered in the Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences, scan the QR Code in the bottom left corner.

Theodora Nandjaa-Mweuta

"A decision I will never regret"

by Theodora Nandjaa-Mweuta
Coordinator: International Relations at NUST

NUST staff member, Theodora Nandjaa-Mweuta, spoke to NUST Brief about her decision to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

As soon as the COVID-19 vaccines were available in Namibia, I took a decision which I have thus far not regretted. Out of being a firm believer in medicine, I decided to get the AstraZeneca shot. When I was due for my second jab, I travelled to my village and took it at the Oshikuku Roman Catholic Hospital. In the queue, I was the only 'second timer'. I immediately became the centre of attention when I informed the nurses that I do not need to fill in forms as I came for the second vaccination. I could see people seeking for reassurance. "What side effects did you have? Which one did you use?" I was asked by people anxiously waiting in line.

"People react differently, fortunately I did not have any side effects," I assured them.

Mid-June my husband started coughing and he went to the pharmacy for self-medication. A week later, the cough was still persistent. We decided to visit a medical doctor. His temperature was 39 degrees Celsius on arrival. He was given medicine and got tested for COVID-19. Two days later he was informed he was positive, while further medical imaging results revealed he had pneumonia.

We isolated together and shared everything, yet I repeatedly tested negative. I am fully vaccinated and I strongly believe this is why I was able to care for my husband when he tested positive for COVID-19. He has since fully recovered, and we continue doing our best to stay safe.

Five NUST students complete internships in Switzerland

Five NUST students recently returned from Switzerland following the completion of their participation in the B360 Education Partnerships Sending North Programme.

The opportunity for NUST students to undertake internships in Switzerland is made possible through an agreement between the University and B360 Education Partnerships, a Swiss-based Non-Governmental Organisation that contributes to skills and knowledge transfer and capacity development in southern Africa.

Anthens Liyali, Nancy Mukubesa, Ernestine Kotongo, Paulus Awala and Pena Nelumbu were selected for the B360 Internship Programme in March 2020, but only left Namibia at the start of May due to global Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

All five students indicated that the internships had provided them with the ideal opportunity to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. "I have learned to be a responsible individual since my superiors did not tell me when to do my work, however, they expected me to deliver. I am glad I could take responsibility and ownership of my work," said Nelumbu.

The students were placed with host families during their stay in Switzerland to ensure that they were fully integrated into Swiss life. "Overall, I had the best experience in Switzerland, all thanks to my host family," Mukubesa said, while Liyali expressed his appreciation to his host family for opening their home to a complete stranger.

Cathleen Sacheus, a Computing student, is currently on internship in Switzerland and will return to Namibia at the end of September 2021.

The partnership between NUST and B360 was established in 2009, and to date close to 90 NUST students have undertaken internships in Switzerland through the B360 Sending North Programme.

(From left to right) NUST students Cathleen Sacheus, Anthens Liyali, Ernestine Nkotongo, Nancy Mukubesa, Pena Nelumbu and Paulus Awala out on excursion in Switzerland during their B360 Internships.